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Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator) *for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia*

INTRODUCTION

The most exciting development for the project this year has been that I have, at last, been able to "atlas" parts of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. My visit in October/November was unfortunately not the ideal time for an atlasing survey. Nevertheless, the data collected filled a number of gaps in the distribution of bird species which were previously known to occur in both the Yemen Arab Republic and the Dhofar Province of Oman but not in between. The visit has provided information on the likely western limits of some endemic and Afrotropical species. The trip was a culmination of several attempts to visit South Yemen but good contacts have now been made in the country, especially with the Research and Extension Department of the Ministry of Agriculture who provided much assistance and perhaps another survey will follow. A short account of the trip is included in this issue. In spring this year I was able to visit north west Saudi Arabia, including five proposed NCWCD reserve areas. A note of the proposed reserve at Jebal al Lawz is included under "Sites of Interest".

I very much appreciate the sponsorship of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation & Development, Riyadh, in providing me with an air ticket to Aden for the PDRY survey and their wide-ranging assisitance on the spring survey to north west Saudi Arabia. As announced in the last issue, the NCWCD sponsored *Phoenix* 5 and will also sponsor this issue. At the time of going to press, the ABBA/NCWCD sponsorship agreement was being completed. Once the agreement is finalised, the overall project plans, detailed in the last issue, can be put into operation.

This issue includes some four new breeding birds and two other additions to the breeding bird list which have come about through "taxonomic drift". I have also had other reports during the year of new breeding birds that have not yet been confirmed by hard facts. These include the pied mynah *Sturnus contra* and the baya weaver *Ploceus philippinus*, both in the UAE. In addition, Arthur Stagg reports that he has heard from others that squacco heron *Ardeola ralloides* bred this year near Hail (HB32). Hopefully, details will be available for *Phoenix* 7.

Best of luck to all contributors planning atlasing surveys in 1990.

Michael Jennings

NEW BREEDING SPECIES

This column provides details and discussion of species that are additional to the 1987 *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (Form 2). The list, provided to all contributors, is also available for sale (see enclosed sales list). The number shown against each bird is the species code reference to be used in reporting observations on Form 3; the scientific name generally follows the Voous *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species* (BOU, 1977). Only confirmed breeding species are added to the list though readers will find potential breeding species under notes elsewhere in *Phoenix*. A revised Form 2 will be prepared in due course.

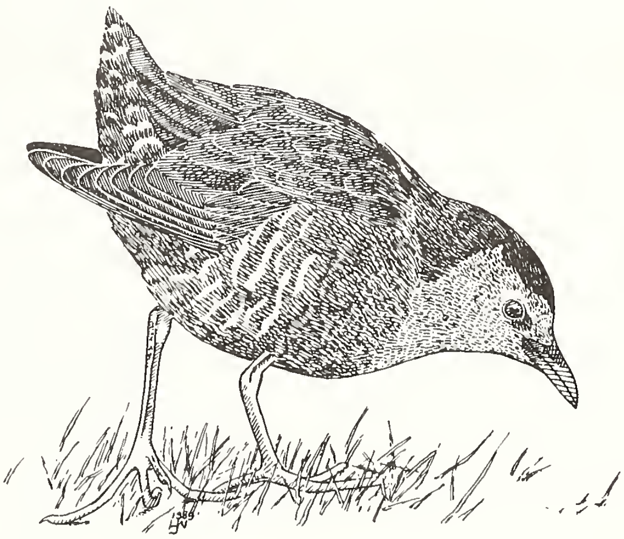

Fig 1 Little crake, breeding for the first time in Arabia at Tabuk, northern Saudi Arabia.

0170 *Alopochen aegyptiacus* Egyptian goose

The Egyptian goose is a resident and partial migrant over much of sub-Saharan Africa including the whole of the Red Sea coast of Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. In view of its occurrence on the African side of the Red Sea, the occasional sightings of this bird on the Red Sea coast of Arabia are probably natural occurrences of wild birds. However, this goose is also found in private collections and occurrences in previous years in the Arabian Gulf, e.g. in Qatar (RB27)

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and Jubail (FB31) are almost certainly escapes. The Egyptian goose has now bred ferally in the Gulf, on Abu Dhabi Island (UA25).

It has been known to have been kept in a collection on Sir Bani Yas Island (SB25) off the coast of Abu Dhabi for some time. In May 1989 an adult appeared in mangroves near Abu Dhabi with eight goslings (P.Hellyer and *ENHG (Abu Dhabi) Bulletin* 38:28). Unfortunately, during the few days after the goslings were first seen they gradually reduced in number and eventually all disappeared, possibly the victims of a predator.

In Africa this goose has a preference for open wetlands and coastal areas, feeding on a wide variety of vegetable matter usually obtained by grazing on land. In some areas it is a crop pest. Its nest is placed in a range of sites from ground level hollows to 60m above ground.

All observations of breeding escaped birds are relevant to the ABBA project and should be reported, especially species such as this which have the potential to colonise many wetland areas, both inland and coastal.

0410 *Porzana parva* little crake

The little crake occurs in Arabia infequently in winter and on migration between breeding grounds in central Eurasia and its main wintering area in north east Africa. It is suspected to be an occasional breeding bird in Egypt and elsewhere in the Near East. Arthur Stagg has submitted the following note of breeding at the sewage settling lagoons of the Tabuk military complex (CB33). Other birds found in these phragmites fringed lagoons are dealt with in more detail in Arthur's "Site of Interest" article later in this issue.

> "Male and female crakes were first seen on 5 July 1989 but because of imperfect views of them caused by the very dense nature of the reedbeds and poor lighting conditions it was not until 18 July that positive separation from the often very similar Baillon's crake *Porzana pusilla* was achieved. Confirmation came when the male approached to within 3 meters and briefly thrust his head clear of the reeds to show the diagnostic (but not easily seen in the field) red spot at the base of the bill. From 21 July until 27 July I saw only the female crake. On 28 July, in poor light at dusk I saw 2 birds which I thought were juveniles but it was not until 11 August that I was satisfied breeding had occurred, when I saw both male and female adult birds and 3, possibly 4, juveniles. On 18 August I saw the adult female and 4 juveniles together. Subsequently I saw the juveniles on many occasions in good light conditions as they ran clear of the dense reeds to feed from the partially submerged weed in open water. The adult birds continued to stay in cover."

1149 *Oenanthe deserti* desert wheatear

The desert wheatear is known to breed throughout north Africa, north of the Sahara, Sinai, the Near East and then through Iran to China. When breeding it inhabits open arid areas, preferring hard, stony places to sand dunes. It is a common winter visitor to all areas of Arabia but especially to the open steppe deserts of central Arabia.

There have been a number of records collected for ABBA of this species singing and pairing in north central parts of Saudi Arabia, but also from as far afield as the Arabian Gulf coast of the Eastern Province and the south west corner of the Empty Quarter.

Whilst engaged in the NCWCD houbara bustard project in April and May 1989, John Norton found this wheatear common throughout the Harrat al Harrah (FA38) reserve area in the far north of Saudi Arabia. The Harrat al Harrah reserve (see *Phoenix* 5:8) is a vast area of lava outcrops and eroded basalt. Males were singing and displaying in the reserve on 22 April but the first indication of breeding was a female with a probable juvenile on 16 May. A female was seen carrying food on 20 May and, later the same day, breeding evidence was clinched by the observation at close quarters of a pair with two newly fledged juveniles.

1653 *Carduelis carduelis* goldfinch

The goldfinch is a breeding resident in much of Europe, North Africa and the Near East. It has been an erratic, mainly winter, visitor to the Arabian Gulf States but has occurred quite regularly in the most north eastern parts of Saudi Arabia in recent years. Arthur Stagg reports on the bird's present status at Tabuk (CB33):-

> "In a checklist of Tabuk birds produced in 1982 by F.J.Walker and myself the presence of young goldfinches at Tabuk in June and July was noted but was not regarded as positive proof of breeding. Since then the goldfinch population in this area has grown manyfold and the presence of young birds, from the incomplete to the fully fledged state, seen feeding on sunflowers throughout late June - early July this year (1989) leaves no doubt of the breeding status of this species."

LUMPING AND SPLITTING

Undisputed additions to the Arabian breeding avifauna are dealt with under the "New Breeding Species" column above. However, from time to time, the centre of gravity of scientific opinion concerning the taxonomy of some Arabian birds shifts, making it necessary to adjust the ABBA breeding birds list to fit current opinion. This new column is introduced to record these changes in taxonomy and nomenclature to ensure uniformity of treatment by ABBA contributors when reporting records. All contributors are asked to follow the *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* (Form 2) and amendments thereto, whether they agree or not with these nomenclatural changes, otherwise confusion is likely. If any readers do disagree with an opinion expressed in this column or on the breeding birds list please write in. The list is not set in concrete and must remain flexible.

Mourning & South Arabian wheatears

The wheatears create as many problems for birders in the field as they do for systematists looking at skins. Several species are superficially similar, many occur in similar arid/open habitat and polymorphism within a species is relatively common. Discreet geographical morphs push the rules of lumping and splitting to their limits. The mourning wheatear 'group' is especially complicated. Until now, the ABBA *List of Breeding Birds of Arabia* has shown only No.1154 *Oenanthe lugens* mourning wheatear.

Meinertzhagen, in *Birds of Arabia* (1954) and most other authors recognise five races of the mourning wheatear which are of interest to those studying the Middle East area. *O.lugens lugentoides* and *O.l.boscaweni* are resident in southern and south-western Arabia; the nominate *lugens* occurs at the eastern end of the Mediterranean in Palestine and Jordan; *halophila* breeds in north Africa and *persica* visits central and eastern Arabia in winter. All five birds are distinguishable in the field. (N.B. A black morph occurs in the lava fields of Jordan and Syria. These were previously thought by some to be eastern pied wheatears *O.picata*; *B.W.P.* Vol.5)

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* Scientific names of all species included in the project and their reference numbers are given on Form 2: *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* - issued free to all contributors. The names of other species and additions to the list are given in full. To save space, localities mentioned in the text (except major towns) are suffixed by the atlas square reference and these can be seen on the maps in this issue. Bibliographic references are kept to a minimum and are given in abbreviated form. All articles are attributable to the Editor unless otherwise shown.

In recent years, some authors have begun to lump *lugentoides* and *boscaweni* into a separate species and have dubbed it the South Arabian wheatear (*O.lugentoides*), and by so doing it becomes an endemic species. The main justification for specific status seems to be that these two southern Arabian birds have marked sexual dimorphism. *Lugens* and *persica* are not markedly sexually dimorphic but the north African *halophila* is. The male of the South Arabian wheatear is superficially similar to *lugens* but the female is a much browner bird, although it does have a prominent pale wing panel reminiscent of most of the group. Other differences between *lugens* and *lugentoides* are that the latter is a much more robust bird; in profile it is less sleek than *lugens* and it occurs in rather more bushy, less open habitats. Because of lack of information it is not clear yet whether the South Arabian wheatear differs from mourning wheatears in terms of its nesting habits, egg and song, etc.

The atlas project has, so far, thrown light on two important points about these birds. Firstly, preliminary reports show for the first time that *lugens* is almost certainly a widespread breeding bird in north west Saudi Arabia. It appears to be highly local to sandstone areas. Secondly, it is clear that there is a substantial gap between the ranges of *lugens* and *lugentoides* (see map at Fig 3).

In view of the differences between these two birds it is reasonable that they should henceforth be treated as separate species. Accordingly future editions of the *List of the Breeding Birds of Arabia* will show 1154 mourning wheatear and 2020 South Arabian wheatear.

The atlas project has also revealed that there are, apparently resident, mourning wheatears in the harrat and granite areas of north central Saudi Arabia that may be *halophila*. If so, it would be a 1,000 km eastward extension of their known range in north Africa. Further information on the status and identity of birds in north central Saudi Arabia and the nidification of the South Arabian wheatear is needed.

M.C.J.

Red Sea reed warblers

Phoenix 4:2 drew attention to the reed warblers inhabiting mangrove on both sides of the Red Sea. J.S.Ash *et al* have now published a paper (*Bull.BOC* 109:36-43) on these Red Sea birds and concluded that they should be regarded as a race of the African reed warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*. They do not regard the African reed warbler as being conspcific with the Eurasian reed warbler *A.scirpaceus*. They have named the Red Sea bird as a new sub-species, the name and description of the bird taken from the paper are as follows:

> "*Acrocephalus baeticatus avicenniae* subsp.nov.
> *Description and diagnosis*. Differs from *A.b.cinnamomeus* in being olive-brown above, with rusty tinge confined to rump and upper tail coverts, but lacking on wing feathers; slightly paler on head and mantle. Worn birds are paler with a greyish cast above. Supercilium creamy white. Almost uniform creamy white below with only a slight buff suffusion on the flanks and thighs, in contrast to the deep rich buff on the breast, flanks and under tail coverts typical of *A.b.cinnamomeus*. Under wing coverts creamy white.
> *Distribution*. Mangroves on the Red Sea coasts of Ethiopia (Eritrea), Sudan, Saudi Arabia, North Yemen, and the Gulf of Aden coast of Somalia.
> *Measurements* (in mm). *Type*: wing flattened 59, tail 48, tarsus 21, bill (culmen to skull) 16.5, hind claw 5; measured ascendantly, 2nd primary falls between 6th and 7th: 10th primary shortfall (distance from tip of 10th primary to wingtip on closed wing) 9mm."

Debate about the taxonomic position of this new bird is likely to continue. However, the description and habitat of the Red Sea birds and Eurasian reed warblers, which have, this year, been found breeding for the first time in Arabia near Tabuk (see "Sites of Interest" below) are sufficiently distinct to justify them being treated separately for ABBA purposes. Therefore, observers should report mangrove breeding reed warblers as species code 2021 *Acrocephalus baeticatus*: African reed warbler, and birds found breeding in inland reed beds etc. should tentatively be recorded as species code 1251 *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, Eurasian reed warbler. In view of the possible confusion of records of both species with various *Acrocephalus* migrants, Breeding Evidence Codes 00, 01 and 03 will not normally be valid.

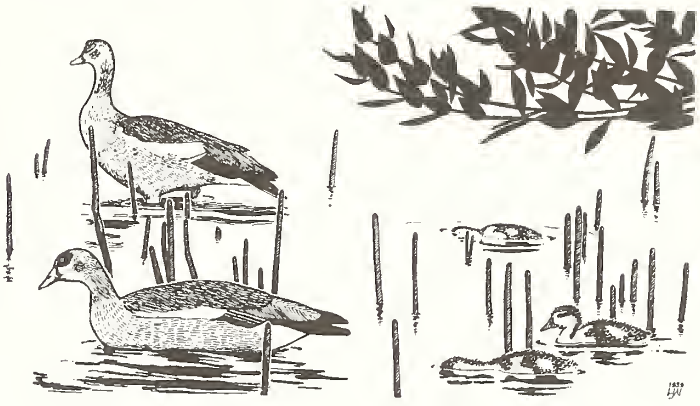

Fig 2 Egyptian goose, bred ferally near Abu Dhabi in 1989. Could this species colonise Arabian wetlands?

RICHARD MEINERTZHAGEN

All those interested in Arabian birds will, sooner or later, come across this name. His *Birds of Arabia* (1954) is still the only book covering in detail most of the birds of the Arabian Peninsula. This book, and his other papers on Arabian and Middle East birds, are quoted time and time again in many modern works, but who was the author and what was he? He was not, as many people think, a person with many years' field experience of the birds of the Arabian Peninsula. It is true that he visited many places in Arabia over a period of half a century and worked on specimens from Arabia for a string of papers but it is probably true to say that he did not do any serious ornithological work actually in Arabia until the late 1940's when he was 70 years old and already writing *Birds of Arabia*. At that time he led an expedition of several weeks duration in the southern Hejaz of Saudi Arabia and later went to the Yemen Arab Republic. He made a trip across Arabia in 1951 but his studies on that occasion were unfortunately curtailed due to problems with his eyes and his having to fly from Riyadh to Jedda.

He was much, much more than a bird man and his life continues to be a major source of information and curiosity for those interested in the political and military history of his times. A new biography, probably not the last, of this man has been prepared by Mark Cocker: *Richard Meinertzhagen Soldier, Scientist and Spy*.

Meinertzhagen died in 1967 leaving a rich source for biographers in the form of 76 volumes of personal diaries which are lodged at Oxford and five autobiographical works. Mr. Cocker takes us through this fascinating man's life from a childhood deprived of his mother's love and ill-treatment at school, a short, much resented, career in banking, young manhood fed on a diet of fresh air, shooting and fishing, to his career in the army. In the army he saw active service in India, Africa and the Middle East. His diaries point to a man often at odds with the world. Seemingly overendowed with opinions, arrogance and self-righteousness he met many in his military career, especially his senior officers who were, in his eyes, incompetent and inefficient. He tended to see people in violent black and white terms. He either liked them or detested them, although he usually kept his private thoughts for his diaries, often in vitriolic pen pictures. He seems to have had precisely the same effect on the opinion of others because most of those who knew him have very strong feelings of him one way or the other.

The central question that runs through the book and developed by the author at a talk given to the OSME AGM in July 1989 was the extent to which Meinertzhagen made his life up! At the least there seems some evidence that he revised his diary to make himself appear more important than he actually was and more perceptive about how the world was developing. His diaries are not, unfortunately, in their original state. They have been retyped and the originals destroyed. The author finds many inconsistencies in his diaries and his letters with the testimony of others and objectively sorts through this evidence. All those the author met in preparing the book and who knew Meinertzhagen had very strong views about him and therefore the author feels that his greatest advantage in writing the book was that he never actually knew Meinertzhagen himself, otherwise his subject and his perspective would almost certainly have been biased. His main problem was what to leave out, bearing in mind the vast amount of source material available and the still fresh anecdotes of many of Meinertzhagen's acquaintances, enemies and confidantes. The author also deals with the allegations that Meinertzhagen had unorthodox ornithological methods which were at times unethical - even dishonest. Here the testimony of several past and, indeed, present academics was introduced which suggest that he stole important bird skins for his own considerable collection and re-labelled others (a heinous crime in museum circles) to show different provenance or information to accord with his own views. Inconsistencies between his skins and his diaries are found in his published works from Tibet to the Cape Verde Islands and have led some to suggest that his entire bird collection of many thousands of skins, which he bequeathed to the British Museum (Natural History), was best destroyed!

As I have been interested in Arabian birds for some years I have scrutinised most of his published work on Arabian birds, have often examined skins from his collection and have had the privilege of examining parts of his Arabian diary. In a funny sort of way I feel I know the man too. The parts of his diaries which concern Arabia reveal, to my mind, a very private man, much more sensitive than people who met him perceived. His skin collection at the British Museum is immaculate in its preparation. I have also seen the Bates and Philby manuscript entitled *Birds of Arabia* which Meinertzhagen's detractors say he published under his own name after Bates' death. Meinertzhagen was in fact invited in the 1940's to take over the Bates manuscript by Philby, who was never a keen enough ornithologist himself to work on the book after Bates' death in 1940. Mark Cocker paints a picture of Meinertzhagen falling out with Philby and it certainly seems the two were not speaking to each other in the years before publication. It cannot be argued that the Bates typescript of 429 pages was anything but a godsend to anyone writing a book on the birds of Arabia. Bates had painstakingly collected together a detailed account of bird distribution in Arabia from skins (many collected by Philby) and industriously tracked down virtually everything ever published on Arabian birds. This basic source would eventually have been worked up into some kind of handbook with paragraphs on description and breeding, etc. In the end I think this is what Meinertzhagen did. However, this work would have exceeded the work done already by Bates and Philby and because of this it is clearly fair that the book should be attributed to Meinertzhagen. Equally, however, Meinertzhagen should properly have recorded and acknowledged the very great undertaking of Bates on which the final work drew. The chapter on Arabian ornithological exploration is Bates' manuscript repeated almost word for word.

Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia* was, and is, a standard of reference on the area but included a good measure of the idiosyncratic views of the author's extremely individual theories and speculative ideas about nature and birds. The book contains a number of points and omits others which are very difficult to explain. He has slender-billed gull breeding in Bahrain although there is no evidence for this. His diary shows that in 1951 he shot a red-crested pochard in Bahrain but the species is not mentioned in his book. There was a published reference of the lappet-faced vulture occurring in central Arabia (it is now known to be a widespread breeder in that area) but he does not include the species. On the other hand he does mention several Ruppell's griffon vulture records though this species has never been satisfactorily recorded. There is one Arabian skin of this raptor in the British Museum but of doubtful origin.

After publication of *Birds of Arabia* Meinertzhagen never visited Arabia again or published anything more on the area, although he did continue to travel widely throughout the rest of his life until he died in rather tragic circumstances in London.

Mark Cocker's book is an enthralling, well-balanced account of a intriguing man. It is recommended to all those interested in Arabian birds and the history of the first half of the 20th century.

Hardback, 292 pages (155 x 234mm) price £14.95. Published by Secker & Warburg. ISBN 0-436-10299-4.

M.C.J.

KUWAIT 50 YEARS AGO: Col.H.R.P.Dickson's Game Register

I have recently been privileged to be able to examine the game register of Col.H.R.P.Dickson for the period that he was in Kuwait 1929 - 1951. It opens a fascinating window into bird life in Kuwait during that period, especially quarry species such as the houbara bustard and sandgrouse. At that time these species were numerous but are now almost totally absent.

The game register shows that Col.Dickson hunted regularly during the season of October to April. On the other hand it gives no hint of occurrences during the summer period, the close season, and so no conclusion as to whether the houbara and sandgrouse were breeding during those years can be drawn. Almost certainly the majority of these birds were winter visitors. It is also a pity that the author gives only very patchy notes on the birds he hunted, dates and localities are also sometimes imprecise. Apart from a very few records in the extreme north east of Saudi Arabia, virtually all the bags mentioned are from within the present day boundaries of Kuwait.

From the register it can be seen that the houbara was a common bird most winters in Kuwait during those years. Some years, rather inexplicably, they are not mentioned at all and from this one concludes that they did not arrive, probably due to unfavourable weather or vegetation conditions. There is no easy way to compare year to year bags because his hunting seasons were imprecise, the number of hunts per year varied and sometimes Col.Dickson was shooting and at other times hunting with falcons without differentiating this in his register. As such, the mass of data in the register is not precise enough to work out houbara population trends, except only by a very broad yardstick. Over the whole period a general trend may be perceived. From 1929 - 1939 (eleven seasons) he averaged nine houbara a year. During the period from 1940 - 1951 (twelve seasons) he average only five a year. However it is particularly interesting that, in the second period, there was much greater fluctuation in the numbers of birds bagged each year. For example, in the years 1942 and 1946 he got 24 and 23 birds respectively but in all the other years during that period he got four or less birds. Also, during the years 1933 - 1935 he notes some particularly large daily bags for organised hunting trips with other guns of 100, 103, 90 and 82 birds with a mere 36 on one day in 1936 regarded as "disappointing as season early-being

November". During the later period there was only one organised shoot mentioned with a total bag of 47 houbara. Obviously north east Arabia sheltered huge populations of houbara during the first half of this century.

Sandgrouse bags are also exceptionally interesting on account of the large numbers shot. During the whole of the 23 years mentioned he got a total of 234 black-bellied sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis* and 809 sandgrouse of indeterminate species. The latter were almost certainly mostly pin-tailed sandgrouse though he does on one occasion mention he also got spotted sandgrouse. The records of sandgrouse in Kuwait of all species in recent years can almost be counted on the fingers of two hands! Large numbers of wintering sandgrouse still regularly occur in the extreme north of Saudi Arabia.

Col.Dickson's game registers show other bird species hunted including stone curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* (he got a total of 16 in the years mentioned and regarded them as "good eating"), a few duck and snipe. Bigger game included a few hares and two wolves shot in 1930.

M.C.J.

BREEDING LITTLE GREBE IN DUBAI

1989 was a good year for breeding little grebe in the United Arab Emirates. There is little evidence of the species nesting in the country prior to 1988, which seems rather odd when compared with records received by the Dubai Natural History Group in 1989. Six likely nest sites were identified, all in locations of freshwater resulting from man's direct influence. These included reservoirs at Ras al Khaimah (VB28) and Hatta, a gravel pit at Kalba (WA27), flooded rubbish dumps at Sharjah and Ajman and a water treatment plant in Dubai (all VA27).

Fortunately I live close enough to monitor the proceedings almost daily at the Zabeel water treatment plant in Dubai, and as the summer progressed it proved to be a most successful and satisfactory site for two pairs of little grebe. One pair probably started nesting in mid May on floating debris amongst the branches of a mesquite tree *Prosopis juliflora* overhanging one of the four settlement ponds at the plant, as two chicks were first noted in mid June. This was quite a surprise, and first alerted me to search for the nest. I found two nests on 23 June, one of which had four eggs (the other nest was rather inaccessible and the contents impossible to see). This had increased to five eggs by 28 June, when one egg was in the process of hatching. Four chicks appeared swimming with the parents in mid July.

The season progressed very well for the birds, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep track of adults, chicks, and growing juveniles! The other pair appeared to have mated again, and a further three chicks appeared near nest No.2 on 4 August. By mid September there were six adults and 12 juveniles present.

Believing the action was all over, my attention relaxed for a week or so; but I was wrong to think the season had finished. On 20 September two more chicks appeared with their parents from the direction of nest No.2, and on 24 September an adult was again sitting on nest No.1, which now contained another egg. I must have overlooked this egg for some days, for on the 5 October another tiny chick emerged from the nest and swam off with its parents.

As casual breeders these birds have done very well in Dubai in 1989. They have shown that egg-laying and raising chicks continuously throughout the Arabian summer poses no problem when suitable conditions prevail.

Colin Richardson, P.O.Box 2825, Dubai, UAE.

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RECENT REPORTS

Some records received for the Atlas stick in the mind as being especially interesting on account of the species, location, habitat, period of breeding or the number of birds involved. The following are a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records received within the the last 12 months (some relate to earlier years). Records of unusual birds often get reported by more than one observer and although care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, it is regretted if the original finder of a rare bird is not identified here.
Little bittern Juveniles just able to fly at

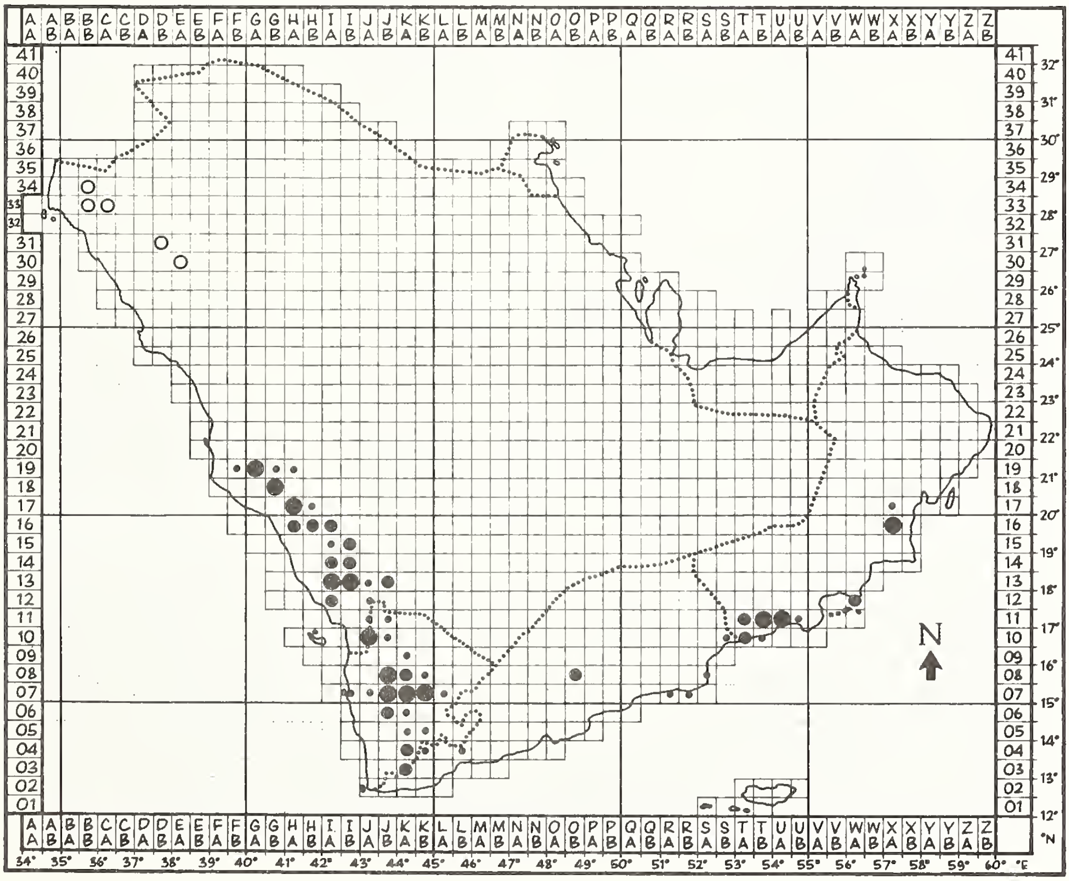


Fig 3 The ranges of the mourning and South Arabian wheatear in Arabia. Differing habitat preferences strengthens the case for 'splitting'.
South Arabian wheatear
● Confirmed breeding
• Probable breeding
· Other records
Mourning wheatear
○ Probable breeding

lagoons south of Riyadh (MB26) July 1989 (D.R.James). First breeding in central Arabia.

Cattle egret Colony of 65+ nests with chicks found on the Farasan Islands (IA10) June 1988 (P.Symens). New breeding record for the Farasan Islands.

Purple heron Display by adults seen Farasan Islands, KSA (IA10) April 1988 and fledged juveniles June 1988 (P.Symens). A new breeding species for the Farasan Islands.

Sacred ibis One at Al Lith (GA17) on the Red Sea coast of KSA in 1987 (P.Symens), one south of Riyadh (MB25) for a month May/June 1988 (A.J.Stagg), one in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (QA29) July 1988 (Mr & Mrs T.Heindel) and another Bahrain October 1986. The last three records could be escapes or from the Iraq population. The Red Sea coast record is most likely to be a bird wandering from Africa. Could it breed?

Mallard Bred Al Lith (GA17) 1987 (P.Symens). Another breeding record for a species which has now bred in the UAE, at Riyadh and at Tabuk.

Black-shouldered kite Bred el Kod, PDRY (LA03) August 1989 (N.Obadi).

Lammergeier A juvenile at Shigri, KSA (BB33) March 1989 (M.C.J.). The first record from northern Arabia in several years.

Bonelli's eagle Pair, probably nest prospecting, Jebel Faiyah (VB27) UAE, June 1989 (*Emirates Bird Report* 8, 1989).

Verreaux's eagle Nest building in the southern Hejaz, KSA (HA18) March 1989 (P.Symens), a pair in the Wajid sandstones (KA12) February 1989 (R.N.Fryer) and another pair at Jebel al Lawz March 1989 (DA34) (M.C.J.). All new areas in KSA for this rare species.

Lanner falcon On eggs near Ad Darb April 1989 (D.le Mesurier). A new breeding area for this species.

Arabian bustard Information has been collected of several sightings in south west Saudi Arabia during the summer of 1988 including a female with two chicks (M.Shobrak).

Moorhen Breeding in swampy ground near Khor Kalba (WA 27) on the UAE east coast (*ENHG(AD) Bulletin* 38:26) and near Sharjah (VA27) Apr-May 1989 (*Emirates Bird Report* 8, 1989). First UAE breeding records.

Arabian red-legged partridge Common at Jebel Dhukhkhan (EB29) March 1989 and a single bird at Fiqrah (EB25) April 1989 (M.C.J.). A considerable range extension, these are the only records of this Arabian endemic partridge north of Taif excepting an enigmatic record by Sir Richard Burton in the 19th century from "Midian".

Harlequin quail Seen in Wadi Sirr (IB10) October 1988 (P.Symens). A further Saudi Arabian record of an erratically occurring species.

Quail Many birds calling in alf-alfa fields south of Riyadh (MB26) May-July 1989, five chicks at end of July (D.R.James).

Crowned sandgrouse Observed in interior deserts of YAR (KB08) September 1983 (M.I.Evans). Very few records from south west Arabia.

Sulphur crested cockatoo There is apparently a free-flying breeding colony of this species in the palace gardens at Abu Dhabi (UA25) from birds released in 1988 (P.Hellyer and others). *Phoenix* 3:2 records a previous breeding occurrence of this potential pest species in Jedda.

European bee-eater Very young juveniles with adults Ras al Khaimah, UAE (VB28) June 1989 (Richardson, 1989 in *Gazelle* 4 (7):2-4). First UAE breeding record.

Blue-cheeked bee-eater Juveniles with adults Fujairah (WA27) June 1989 (Richardson, 1989 in *Gazelle* 4 (7):2-4. First UAE breeding record.

Thick-billed lark Nest building early June 1989 in the north east area of the Nafud desert (EA33) KSA (C.Thouless). Second probable breeding record for Arabia.

Great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Singing at four sites at lagoons south of Riyadh (MB26) June & July 1989 (D.R.James). Potential breeding species.

Pale rock sparrow Three or four young being fed by adults in the UAE (WA26) during August 1988 (C.Richardson). An interesting breeding record for this erratic species at an unexpected time of year.

Sinai rosefinch Observed just north of Madain Salih (DB30) March 1989 (M.C.J.). Southernmost probable breeding record.

SITES OF INTEREST

Those who have tackled atlas work know just how fulfilling a pursuit it can be. The common birds can be ticked off in each new square visited, the absence of expected birds becomes intriguing and a challenge and the presence of unexpected birds is always exciting. On subsequent visits to a familiar square, one can try to upgrade the previous BEC's obtained. Because of this all

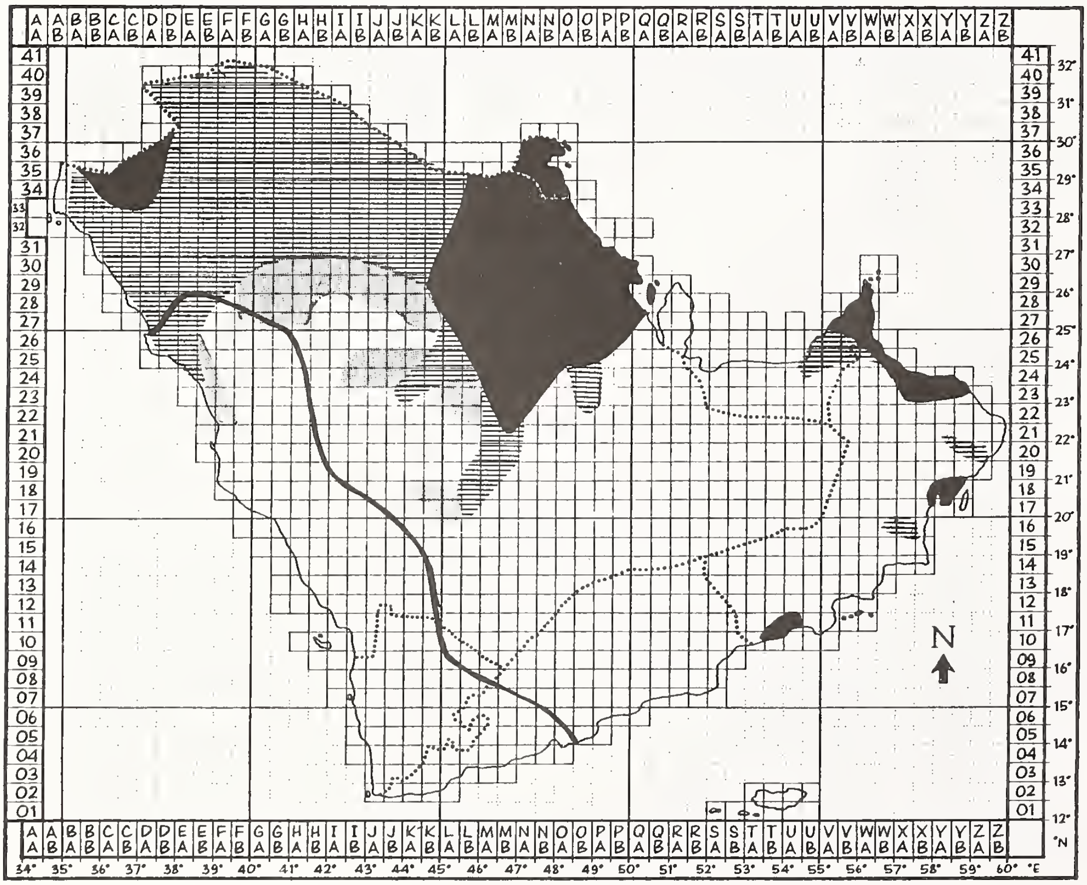


Fig 4 In central Arabia the Eurasian collared dove continues to extend west and south whilst its zone of overlap with the African collared dove increases.
Range of Eurasian collared dove is shaded

■ 1963–1983

▤ 1984–1987

░ 1988+

The range of African collared dove is bordered by a bold line.

sites can be of interest to the atlasser. These following site notes seek to detail the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. It is not meant to be a "where to watch birds in Arabia" or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although inevitably, some sites are exceptionally good.

Observers are asked to submit reports of other interesting sites or those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species occurring. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or other microsite, an urban area or as big as a mountain range.

Wahiba Sands, Sultanate of Oman

Owls in the sand? An unlikely story! But owls were found breeding deep in the Wahiba Sands of Oman during the RGS Wahiba Sands Project, 1985-87. The discovery was one of several made during the multi-disciplinary study of this discrete 13,000 km^2 sand sea, the scientific results of which have been published in *Journal of Oman Studies Special Report* No.3 (1988) (see review below). The main fieldwork was conducted during the four months December 1985 to March 1986, but as I had to spend at least half this time at the Oman Natural History Museum (then just about to open), I have returned at intervals since to provide a more balanced picture of the Sands' ornithology.

The Sands provide a most interesting and varied series of habitats, and although it is impossible to define them too precisely (they occur as a mixture in many places and birds use more than one), for the purpose of the report I selected six types. *Rocky habitat* is found as cliffs, other exposed rocks such as cemented aeolian sands, and as artifacts (well shafts etc.). There were traces of desert eagle owl, little owl, barn owl and brown-necked raven; all may nest here when conditions are right.

Sand is the principal habitat of course, but even this has its variants - from old static dunes to recent mobile dunes, to well-vegetated corridors or "swales" between the former, and sandy plains of many types. Of 16 species seen, only two species nested here, the black-crowned finch lark and the hoopoe lark, though others, such as the spotted thick-knee and little green bee-eater use the sand, but near trees.

The *gravel plains* must also be considered, as they occur in and on the edge of the Sands and affect the ornithology within the region. Twenty-one species were seen here. Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse were probably nesting on one plateau, and the great grey shrike is one of the familiar resident birds certainly nesting in the trees which occur here either individually or thickly along drainage lines. The inclusion of a few peripheral *cultivations and wet wadis* may seem like cheating, but they form an undeniable part of the region and an important attraction and resource for birds (resident and migratory) in a desert environment; 33 species were found. It was in gardens between huge dunes near Mintirib that Bruce's scops owl was heard, later to be found in desert trees in an even further southerly extension of its previously known range.

Desert Trees is the fifth but most important habitat type, and although trees occur elsewhere, they occur in the Sands most importantly in several dense belts. The ability to go far into the Sands to visit some of these (made possible by superb logistic support of the Sultan of Oman's Land Forces) provided new opportunities. Migrating birds certainly use these trees: a great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* is one such, which I saw go to roost in November 1979. Migrant breeders include turtle dove, Bruce's scops owl, rufous bush robin (the first certain breeding record in Oman) and yellow-throated sparrow, all in a new southerly latitude for Arabia. Resident species which nest in the trees include Eurasian collared dove, palm dove, little owl, yellow-vented bulbul, Arabian babbler, great grey shrike and brown-necked raven; also, in a southward extension of their previously known range in Oman, Indian roller, purple sunbird and house sparrow. The long-legged buzzard nests in the trees in the southern half of the Sands, but most move southward after breeding. Spotted thick-knee calling and a pair was seen under trees in March 1986 are the most northerly confirmed records of this species in Arabia: calling was heard again in March 1987, where breeding is very probable, at least after rain.

The proximity of *sea and shore* gives more species for the list, though only one, Kentish plover, was proved to nest there, the most northerly breeding record in Oman. The main importance is in the effect the sea has on the climate of the Sands. The huge mudflats in the SE have long been known to provide a feeding area of international importance to birds. We had hoped that an expedition by RAFOS would examine it in detail during the Project: this proved impossible, and it is now to be looked at by the Durham-based group, West Asian Shorebird Survey (WASS), in the winter 1989/1990.

The results are remarkable for a sand sea. They include important new breeding records for Oman and Arabia, and a re-appraisal of the importance of the desert trees. Of 29 species observed in their breeding season in possible nesting habitats in the Wạhiba Sands. 10 were confirmed (ABBA categories 10-16), and 13 were almost certainly breeding (categories 03-09); six others were quite possibly breeding or would do so if the conditions (adequate rain, vegetation and associated prey fauna) were suitable. It is the possibility of finding more which will attract observers into the Sands repeatedly.

Michael Gallagher, P.O.Box 668, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Tabuk Airbase sewage lagoon, north west Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabian town of Tabuk (CB33) lies 200 k due east of the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. Up until the mid 1970's it was a typical small desert town, sitting in a veritable dust bowl ringed by jebels and frequently afflicted with dense and long-lasting sandstorms. Vegetation was sparse, surface water virtually non-existant and it had a paucity of birds to match. Then in the mid 1970's and on to the present time the area experienced large scale urban and rural development. Today there is a sprawling township surrounded by farms growing cereals, fruit and market garden produce and engaged to a lesser extent in animal husbandry. In consequence the landscape, the ecological environment and the avifauna of the region have changed.

During the years 1977-79 I was based on a military contonment at Tabuk. I returned to the same location in 1989 on permanent assignment to find that within this once lacklustre bird area there is now a site of special interest.

The living areas of the base boast hundreds of deciduous and conifer trees, hedges, gardens and grassed areas. Nearby the sewage settling lagoons are densely fringed with phragmytes growing to a height of 6m and more. These features attract a number of breeding species, at least two of which are new to the Arabian breeding bird list; little crake and goldfinch - see "New Breeding Species" above.

Unfortunately I did not return to Tabuk until the third week in June and therefore a full assessment of the breeding birds present within this military site must wait until next year. However, the following interim summary of some of the more notable breeding species may be of interest:

Mallard At least three pairs successfully bred raising 20 young.

Ferruginous duck A count on 28 July produced a tally of 35 birds including 26 young ranging in age from about 3-5 days old to fully fledged and capable of flight. The only previous record of breeding in Saudi Arabia is from Hofuf in the Eastern Province (John Palfrey).

Water rail The distinctive squeaks and squeals of the water rail emanating from four of the large densely reeded lagoons suggest a substantial poulation. A juvenile was first seen on 7 July and then adults and juveniles several times thereafter.

Black-winged stilt The best count was 65 on 21 July. In a flock of 40 counted on the ground 18 were juvenile birds. Almost certainly bred at Tabuk.

Little ringed plover Eight juveniles were present on 21 July. Like the previous species almost certainly bred at Tabuk.

Namaqua dove Appears to be in the early stages of establishing itself. Adults and a minimum of four juveniles recorded on 4 July and seen regularly thereafter.

Eurasian reed warbler I estimate that a minimum of 40 pairs breed. Incompletely fledged young seen late June to mid July.

Clamorous reed warbler Three, possibly four pairs present. Believed to have bred; a pair in one area seen repeatedly foodcarrying.

Desert finch A numerous but localised breeding species. Adults and juveniles seen together late June to early July.

Arthur J.Stagg, P.O.Box 2, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.

Kubbar Island, Kuwait

Kubbar Island lies 33 k offshore due east of Mina Ahmadi at 48°29′E, 29°04′N (AO35). The island is approximately 0.6 k long (east to west) and 0.3 k wide and for the past seven to eight years its small police post has been permanently manned. There are small coral reefs around the island, which makes it a popular destination for day trippers and fishermen who may often spend the weekend moored close in to the beach. Unfortunately, a few visitors are intent on destruction and it is not unusual to find dead seabirds strewn about the island.

Kubbar Island is important because it presently provides nesting grounds for at least four species of sea terns. In July 1958 V.A.D.Sales (*Sea Swallow* 17:81-82, 1965) recorded 2000-2500 bridled terns *Sterna anaethetus* and about the same number (1000-1300 nests) of white-cheeked terns *S.repressa*. Since then the numbers of these two terns have declined but in recent years lesser crested terns *S.bengalensis* have been fairly numerous and a few swift terns *S.bergii* have bred regularly. It is generally assumed that the decline in numbers has been the result of human disturbance and this would appear to be borne out by records for 1983-1987, which are:

Date	*anaeth.*	*bengal.*	*repres.*	*bergii*	Total
22/7/83	650	100	200	14	964
25/7/84	884	-----327----		0	1211
03/8.85	869	404	295	11	1597
22/7/86	916	166	462	2	1546
09/8/87	1612	493	570	1	2676

The records for 1984-87 were provided by Dr N. Downing, who spent several years conducting research on the coral reefs near Kubbar.

The general upward trend in numbers from 1983 to 1986 may reflect what was an increasing deterrent effect of the 'Gulf War' and the very marked increase in 1987 probably resulted from government-imposed restrictions on the movements of all types of craft in Kuwait's waters for a period in that year. There were a number of incidents involving mines in the Gulf during that year and the escalation of hostilities between Iran and Iraq deterred many from venturing far offshore on their fishing trips.

It is very important to determine how breeding numbers have held up since the summer of 1987 and I tried hard, but unsuccessfully, to get out to Kubbar Island during the last week of June and the first few days of July this year (1989). Unfortunately, either the unavailability of a boat or poor weather prevented me from going.

There is some cause for hope that all will be well for Kubbar Island in the near future. The Kuwait Environment Protection Council has placed a proposal before the Government that the island and its coral reefs should be part of a National Park in which appropriate conservation measures will be taken.

C.W.T.Pilcher, P.O.Box 24923, Kuwait.

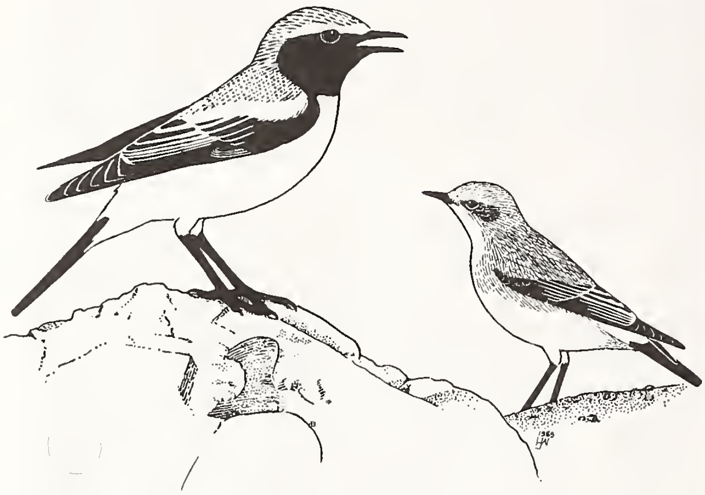


Fig 5 Long suspected as breeding in Arabia, the desert wheatear was added to the list of breeding birds in 1989.

Jebel Al Lawz (BA34), North West Saudi Arabia

There are two really high mountains in north west Arabia, these are Jebel Dibbagh 2,350m, situated at 27.45°N and Jebel al Lawz 2,550m, at 28.40°N. I visited Jebel al Lawz on 26 - 28 March 1989 as part of the seventh ABBA survey to north west Arabia.

Jebel al Lawz is a collection of jebels rather than a single mountain and includes at least 20 peaks over 2,000m. On 27 March I climbed to the top of one of the highest at 2,391m about 3 km east of Jebel Fayhan, the highest peak in the group. These granite mountains are remote and poorly populated. Only a very few Bedu are to be found in the wadis and there is one small village. The NCWCD has earmarked the region as a wildlife reserve. As yet, however, the infrastructure of the reserve has not been set up and an inventory of the wildlife present in the area has to be completed.

The Jebel al Lawz area is best approached up the Wadi Abyad from the Haql-Tabuk road. Follow the wadi for about 30 km and then take the tributary Wadi Lakus on the right for about 4 or 5 km. This brings you to 1,400m, which means you can safely get up and down the nearest, high peaks on a day's trek from Wadi Lakus. The remoter peaks need more time as they can only be approached on foot or by helicopter. I chose to spend one night away from our basecamp and took a sleeping bag and a supply of food and water for the night. Those thinking of going up these mountains should go prepared. It is cold at the top and has changeable weather, indeed on the day I went up it snowed for a short time on the summit and there were pockets of snow left from a previous snowfall in the deeper ravines near the summit.

In the Wadi Lakus one can find the usual selection of the resident birds of the western mountains including sand partridge, palm dove, desert lark, yellow-vented bulbul, white-crowned black wheatear, trumpeter finch and orange-tufted sunbird. The last was particularly active feeding on the pinkish-white flowers of raetama bushes which were the predominant plant in the wadis. On the night of 26 March a Hume's owl was heard.

There is no acacia in the Wadi Lakus or adjacent parts of Wadi Abyad as the acacia species of north west Arabia do not appear to tolerate altitudes above about 1,200m. Because of this, the several species one usually associates with acacia such as blackstart, Arabian babbler and great grey shrike were not found, although these were all present in lower areas where acacia is present. Going up the Wadi Lakus from 'basecamp' the vegetation was especially interesting at about 1,500m with fig trees, wild dates, willow and pistachio trees as well as the first junipers which go all the way to the summit. The most interesting tree is the wild almond which gives the mountain its name, and which is found nowhere else in Arabia. They were in full bloom in late March, but not yet in leaf in common with the other deciduous trees. Almond trees are to be found above 1,500m to about 2,000m. There is permanent running water in the Wadi Lakus. In the ravines and on the slopes Tristram's grackle were quite common and chukar partridges were numerous. Common winter visitors still present in the area included black redstart and desert lesser whitethroat. At 1,900m Sinai rosefinch first put in an appearance and were then found all the way to the summit, although they were also to be found at much lower altitudes in the Hisma sandstones to the east. In the summit area kestrel, rock dove, pale crag martin, scrub warbler, brown-necked and fan-tailed raven were present. The outstanding observation of the day was a fine pair of adult Verreaux's eagle which circled the summit as I reached it.

Approaching the summit I was lucky enough to see a fine group of five ibex which gently walked away from me at only 200m distance the other side of a ravine. The first confirmed ibex record from the reserve. Very fresh tracks of a wolf were seen in one of the higher wadis. One other item of botanical interest is that Jebel al Lawz is one of the only two places in Arabia where wild tulips can be found. I saw lots of plants, and many in bud, but only one was fully opened - a delightful little white flower with a yellow centre.

All in all, 21 resident species were found in the Jebel al Lawz area in the three days spent there. It is likely that several other resident species occur and, almost certainly, additional breeding summer visitors will be found, especially when the deciduous trees of Wadi Lakus are in leaf.

M.C.J.

DOVES UPDATE

Phoenix 2:2, 3:3 & 4:3 have chronicled the several doves and pigeons which have extended their range in Arabia in the last few years. The march of the Eurasian collared dove has continued across Arabia. In the central land mass of Saudi Arabia the range creep is easily monitored through its occurrence on the various trans-Arabian routes. Figure 4 shows what has happened recently. Superimposed on the map are the range limits of the African collared dove showing that overlap is now likely over quite a large area.

Eurasian and African collared doves in central Arabia (by M.C.J.)
On the Harrat Khabar (SB28) in March this year I found both these birds common in acacia-lined wadis amid seas of volcanic boulders. The observation was interesting as neither species was seen in the same area in February 1986. This suggests that not only has the dynamic Eurasian collared dove got to the Harrat Khaybar in the meantime but the African collared dove is eruptive and extends its range north and east in some years just as it is known too in Africa. What was also very interesting in the Harrat Khaybar was that whilst both species were individually, positively identified by their distinctive calls there were a number of individuals which could not be determined by song. The cooing of these unidentified birds seemed to be a mixture of both species song! Could this be the first indication of hybridisation in Arabia or is there some other explanation?

Palm doves in Kuwait (by C.W.T.Pilcher)
The palm dove appears to have reached Kuwait at least as early as 1981, when it was noted by M.S.Ahmed in Rumaithiyah suburb of Kuwait City (OA35). It was recorded in Shuweikh area (NB35) the following year and in different parts of the city in subsequent years. The first confirmed breeding was not recorded until March 1984, when adult and juvenile birds were seen outside the gardens of one of the royal palaces. Since then this dove has spread rapidly to most suburbs and the more distant townships of Jahra and Faheheel.

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

After several attempts over the last three years I finally managed to visit the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) for three weeks during October-November 1989. Although I knew it would not be the best time of year for an atlasing survey I hoped there would be at least some species breeding, but I was generally disappointed. In fact, it is now clear that October/November is positively the worst time to go birding in PDRY as most breeding summer visitors from Africa have returned, the autumn migration is petering out and the winter visitors have not really arrived. All the same, it was a very worthwhile trip, as it enabled me to get a "feel" for the environment of this part of southern Arabia and to visit a country that has been virtually neglected by ornithologists in recent years.

On arrival in Aden the first birds one notices are the Indian house crows. They are present in large numbers throughout Aden and the surrounding areas. Amazingly, everyone remarks on how "few" there are now. This is because a control programme has eliminated at least 240,000 in the last two years. The Indian house crow is an agile, intelligent bird but its extremely large numbers and unsavoury habits have made it a pest species locally. Its predatory habits on other species, especially nestlings, contributes to there being very few other land bird species to be found in the Aden district. The only other birds to be seen regularly in Aden were a few black kites, rose-ringed parakeets, house sparrows, bulbuls and blackstarts. However, just inland of Aden where crows are less numerous, one meets typical Tihama country species such as the chanting goshawk, red-eyed dove, black bushchat, African silverbill and Ruppell's weaver.

My travels in South Yemen took me all the way along the coast to the Oman border where at Al Hawf one can find coastal hills that are heavily forested with a tangle of undergrowth made possible by the fact that the monsoon just touches this part of Arabia. Here, and in the adjacent Dhofar province of Oman, one can find a number of African species breeding. Now that I have visited the eastern part of PDRY, it is clear to me that the Al Hawf/Dhofar zone is, in fact, an island of Afro-tropical species rather than the end of a continuum from the Tihama lowlands of North Yemen. By far the larger part of eastern PDRY is clearly dominated by palearctic desert species. The effect of the highland zones which run through PDRY, on the distribution of montane species could not be fully assessed due to lack of time. It will take another visit to establish, for example, if the Arabian red-legged partridge, South Arabian wheatear and the Arabian warbler extend across the full length of the country. It is unlikely that many Afrotropical species or other Arabian endemics do so.

Fan-tailed ravens and Tristram's grackles were especially common throughout eastern PDRY and especially numerous in coastal settlements. The fan-tailed raven appears to be a pest species at certain times of the year at fish-drying areas which form an important part of the local economy. No notable raptor movements were observed although, clearly, there must be considerable migration over the country at this time of the year. However, one group of white storks was seen thermalling along the coast at Huwairah (PA06). Surprisingly few vultures were in evidence. The Egyptian vulture was widespread in small numbers, but not one griffon vulture was recorded. A single lappet-faced vulture, the second record for PDRY, was observed in the east (QA09). On the coast, large numbers of gulls and terns (about 80% lesser black-backed gulls) were to be found in flocks usually about 1,500-2,000 strong. In a 50 km drive along the coast at low tide 19 such flocks were seen, comprising about 28,000 birds.

In the central coastal area near Belhaf an impressive flock of 33,000 Socotra cormorants were drying themselves on the beach or fishing nearby. Watching a group of fishermen landing their catch of sprats (used in this part of the world as animal fodder) about 50 Persian shearwaters suddenly appeared just off the beach to feed on scraps.

One of the objectives of the survey was to gain information and to make local contacts for a full scale OSME expedition to PDRY in the future. A proposal has now been submitted to OSME.

A full report is in preparation.

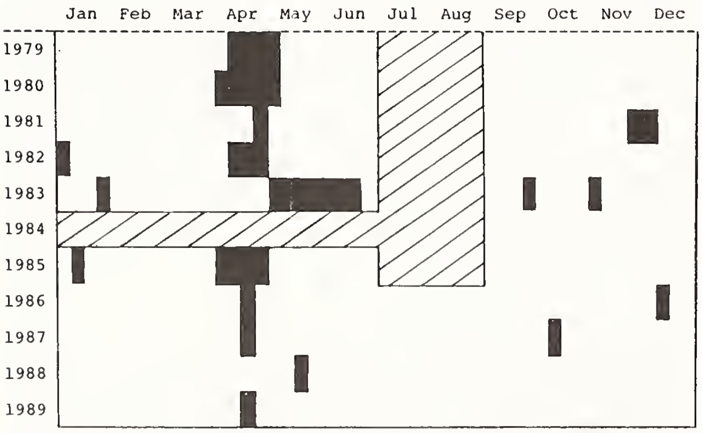
M.C.J.

ORIENTAL SCOURGE - INDIAN HOUSE CROW

As I reported in *Sandgrouse* 8, the Indian house crow attempted to breed in Kuwait in 1982 and then hatched young in 1983 and 1984. However, to date, Kuwait has escaped invasion by this "oriental scourge", although one or two birds turn up annually. Why the house crow has not established itself here is not clear, but I suspect that the urban environment now is simply too clean. Until 1982 it was usual in most urban areas of Kuwait to see garbage lying about or spilling out of dustbins, and the city was literally overrun with rats. The municipal authorities were obliged to act and in an astonishingly successful campaign eradicated the rat population in a very short time. Part of the campaign's success came from compelling householders by law to place all refuse in plastic bags, which then have to be deposited in tough plastic bins supplied to all buildings. Until 1982 the house crow would have had a chance to flourish in Kuwait, but it appears to have 'missed the boat'! Forgive the pun, but it brings me to the question of dispersal. In most instances this bird seems to have arrived in its numerous, adopted locations around the Indian Ocean as a result of being transported by ship. Some may well arrive in Kuwait in this manner but, as I stated in the *Sandgrouse* article, it appears quite likely from the timing of its occurrences that the house crow is also a passage migrant. Figure 6 extends the records reported in 1985 and shows even more clearly that this bird occurs regularly in spring and possibly autumn. These timings would be compatible with natural dispersal from established populations in the southern Gulf.

The article in *Sandgrouse* also reports that the crows were collecting wire for nest building and comments on the nesting sites chosen in Kuwait.

C.W.T.Pilcher.



Shaded areas of the chart indicate those weeks when at least one sighting was made.

Cross-hatched areas signify the absence of observers.

Fig 6 Occurrence of the house crow in Kuwait 1979 - 1989.

PROGRESS SO FAR: BROWN-NECKED RAVEN

The brown-necked raven is probably the most widespread bird in Arabia. It is found on some offshore islands, at the top of the highest mountains and in the remotest of deserts. Because of this wide range, records collected for this species give a good indication of the coverage the project has achieved so far. The up-to-date position for this species can be seen at Fig 7. A good number of squares have been blanked in and others upgraded since the similar map which appeared in Phoenix 5, but there are still large parts of Arabia which have not yet been touched by atlasers. If there is no brown-necked raven record for a square then the chances are there are very few other records from the locality. Atlasers should, therefore, make special efforts to get to the blank squares and report their findings.

+ +

NEW BOOKS

In this column it is hoped to give details of all new books which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds in Arabia or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America but some are on restricted distribution or privately published and those wishing to obtain them must contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned. Those ordering through a library or some other agent are best advised to quote the ISBN or ISSN number shown. The prices shown are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. In general, recommendations made about the worth of books dealt with are based on format, content and standard of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of new books not mentioned in this survey.

BIRDS OF MADINAT YANBU AL SINAIYAH AND IT'S HINTERLAND by Peter J.Baldwin & Brian S.Meadows, 1988

An unusual book as far as Arabian ornithological books go, it focuses on one small area, the new town of Madinat Yanbu al Sinaiyah on the Red Sea coast 300 k north of Jedda. MYAS, for short, is an industrial complex at the Red Sea end of the Jubail and Yanbu project, an oil pipeline from the Eastern Province to Yanbu where the oil is refined. The book aims, and succeeds, in being an illustrated introduction to the birds of MYAS and a radius of 75 k from the town. The book is totally bilingual with an Arabic introduction, tables and illustrations which exactly mirror the English at the front. All text throughout the book is in both Arabic and English. Introductory chapters pay special attention to habitats. Inland areas are dominated by the brooding Jebel Radwa, the haunt of grackles and fan-tailed ravens. Below the jebel are the gardens and cultivated areas before the land slopes away to barren plains of acacia flats where the black-crowned finch lark, great grey shrike and cream-coloured courser are to be found. In the industrial areas of MYAS, a number of interesting birds have been observed in recent years by the authors who have brought together eight years of records in this book. The new town includes three conservation areas of coastal mangroves, protected against a backdrop of huge industrial development. Within the town itself, which includes much landscaping, ornamental gardens and artificial lakes, olivaceous warbler and mallard have bred, so, too, has the rose-ringed parakeet and the Barbary falcon may breed around the refinery. The Yanbu mangroves are one of the few places on the Red Sea coast where the African reed warbler is known to breed and the clamorous reed warbler is also to be found. One particularly interesting discovery was of chukar partridge in the foothills, the southernmost record in western Arabia. Migration aspects take up a good part of the book and the local checklist of nearly 300 species is mostly of migrants. The checklist shows the monthly occurrence of each species throughout the year. Interesting visitors to the area have included white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala* as well as groups of 50+ honey buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, a species which is decidedly scarce anywhere in Arabia. The species accounts vary tremendously, from one sentence covering status and numbers occurring to over 150 words. There are 100 or more colour photographs, SL9 12/89

To Michael C. Jennings, Co-ordinator Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia.
Moonraker Cottage, 1 Eastcourt, Burbage, Wiltshire, SN8 3AG, England

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4. Results of an ornithological survey of Northern Saudi Arabia, 27 February - 26 March 1988 by M.C.Jennings, M.O. al Toum & A.A.A.al Issa (65 pages) £12.		....	....
5. Results of an ornithological survey of the northern Asir & southern Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia. 25 June - 16 July 1988; by M.C.Jennings & M. I. al Salama (65 pages) £12.		....	....
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f) Northern Asir & Southern Hedjaz (Summary of Item 5)		....	....
g) Central & North West Saudi Arabia		....	....
h) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen		....	....
(* These are the equivalent of 3 - 6 close-typed A4 pages, plus 1 or 2 maps)			
7. Oil pollution of the Egyptian Red Sea and Gulf of Suez and its effects on birds (1984) (72 pages) by P. Heathcote, D. Parr, M.C.Jennings & B.Frost £7.		....	....

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All items are post free. If airmail desired add 25% to total above £______________

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20 colour paintings by Edouardo Gonzales and other artwork, tables and figures. The photos and their captions are, in places, a bit confusing mainly, it appears, due to the constraints of the bilingual text. This book is an excellent introduction to the birds of the Arabian side of the northern half of the Red Sea coastal area, for both Arabic and English readers.

Hardback, 136 pages (225 x 240 mm), price not known. Published by the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Madinat Yanbu al Sinaiyah, Saudi Arabia. It may be possible to order copies from Brian Meadows, PO Box 30227, Yanbu al Sinaiyah, Saudi Arabia.

THE BIRDS OF EGYPT by Stephen M.Goodman and Peter L.Meininger, 1989

This is not a field guide or a picture book, and readers will not find descriptions of birds in it. It is about status, occurrence and distribution. This keenly awaited book has, on arrival, created mixed emotions. On the one hand it is a totally authoritative and up-to-date work about the environment and bird status and distribution in Egypt but, on the other hand, it is so expensive as to be outside the price range of many people who would like to have it. One feels that this kind of work should have been in small print with unjustified margins, un-illustrated,in card covers, entitled "Check List of the Birds of Egypt" and sold at one fifth of the price. What cannot be denied however, is that the authors, who also include S.Baha el Din, Joseph Hobbs and Wim Mullie, have produced a handsome and impressive book which will probably last for as long as the previous standard reference on Egyptian birds published in 1930. The preparation of this work has been an amazing industry for the authors over several years, embracing and involving almost everyone who has been to the country in recent years to study birds. The not inconsiderable contribution by visiting amateurs to Egypt is evidenced by the three pages of names in the acknowledgements section. Books of this type may naturally be divided into three parts: introductory chapters, species accounts and appendices. In this book the "introduction" (121 pages) covers ornithological history and studies in Egypt, details of the sources consulted; nomenclature (scientific, English and Arabic); the geography of Egypt (types of environment); nature conservation (history, conventions and legislation), and a separate, long article on bird hunting, commercialism in wild birds and recent man-induced changes in the environment affecting birds. The appendices (71 pages) deal with rejected species, gazetteer, references (almost 700) and four indexes. The species accounts are characteristically thorough as we have come to expect from these authors, who have between them been responsible for probably 90% of all published work on Egyptian birds in the last decade. For each species the scientific and local names are given with, for quick reference, an abbreviated status code, e.g. "WB" "RB". This introduction is followed by a paragraph giving a short summary of species status and occurrence in one or two sentences. After this, an average of 3-5 paragraphs give a thorough, detailed account of breeding occurrence, passage numbers and details of winter/summer visitors as appropriate. Precise dates, numbers and sources are given in each case making rather dull casual reading but clearly a definitive reference source for decades to come.

A final paragraph gives details of ringing recoveries. Most species accounts are backed up by a map giving details of possible, probable and definite breeding. The size of individual maps is generous enough to indicate both specimen and observation locations and breeding, as well as providing in some cases, former breeding range. Breeding atlas squares are shaded so the reader can judge occurrence at a glance. The maps need to be interpreted carefully and hide a number of biases such as unequal coverage of the country by observers and extremely disparate areas in terms of bird communities. Most of Egypt has a very poor avifauna but the dissection of the country by the Nile valley, with up to 60 breeding species per square, produces some strange maps. Coverage is good for the Nile, its delta, Sinai, parts of the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts but poor almost everywhere west of the Nile. In the western desert are several isolated oases which have up to 40 breeding birds but all are surrounded by birdless wastes where many squares have failed to produce any breeding birds despite coverage by ornithologists. Much of the west still has never been visited by ornithologists. There are 103 breeding maps, several of which cover more than one species, 70 other maps, histograms, graphs and 17 miscellaneous tables. The book is illustrated with six colour plates by Sherif Baha el Din depicting 41 typical, specialist, or breeding species found in Egypt. The plates are generally in field guide style but are arranged according to the main regions of the country rather than to taxonomic classification. Many of the individual bird plates are exceptionally good although, for a number of species, the relative size of birds on the plates is erroneous and slightly misleading. The authors have done their work well. This book is an essential reference for anyone seriously interested in Egyptian birds and is recommended.

Hardback, 568 pages (195 x 252mm), price £70. Published by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP, U.K. ISBN 0-19-857644-7.

THE SPARROWS by J.Dennis Summers-Smith, 1988

In this monograph the author recognises 20 'true' sparrows in the genus *Passer*. It does not concern the *Petronia* sparrows, of which three species breed in Arabia. Altogether, there are five *Passer* species on the Arabian list at the present time, three breed, one possibly breeds and one is accidental. To avoid readers re-checking their finger counting, these include the house sparrow (which ABBA records suggest may still be colonising parts of southern Arabia) and the Arabian golden sparrow which is recognised by ABBA and tick-hunters as endemic but by this author as only a race of the African golden sparrow. The third breeding bird is not the Spanish sparrow as most might think, which is, in fact, only a potential breeder (see *Phoenix* 3: 5-6), but *Passer motitensis*, the rufous sparrow. What's that!? This wide-ranging African species breeds as the isolated race *insularis* on the islands of Sokotra and Abd Al Kuri (PDRY). N.B. Sokotra specialities are not listed on the ABBA breeding birds list. The fifth *Passer* is the tree sparrow *P.montanus* which has occurred four times in the UAE. However, the Arabian sparrows story does not end there. Just north of the ABBA area the enigmatic Dead Sea sparrow occurs in its restricted range. This bird must surely be a real candidate for future breeding in northern Arabia and its ability to colonise has been demonstrated again in the last decade by its breeding range expansion into Cyprus. What about the desert sparrow? It has, in fact, been reported in Arabia, but no reports have been substantiated. Whilst records seem most likely to be erroneous it is indeed curious that the species has a classic two-centre distribution in the Sahara in the west and again in central Asia in the east. Why does it not occur in Arabia? Could it be present but not yet discovered in some isolated habitat? No less than four other sparrows have ranges that abut Arabia. In the lowland zone of the Horn of Africa from Somalia, through Eritrea to Sudan three species occur in habitat which is identical to that found in the Tihama of Arabia. On this basis the grey-headed sparrow, Swainson's sparrow and the Somali sparrow could easily stray into, even colonise, Arabia. On the other side of the peninsula the Sind jungle sparrow occurs in south-east Iran and could, likewise, arrive in eastern Arabia. Therefore, eleven of the world's twenty *Passer* species are of direct interest to Arabian bird enthusiasts and this book is consequently extremely relevant to their library.

Two thirds of the book is devoted to species accounts which cover nomenclature, description (by race), biometrics, distribution (by race), habitat, behaviour, breeding biology, survival (longevity), moult, voice and food. Not all topics are covered for each species and coverage, understandably, varies enormously reflecting knowledge of each bird. Hence there are 48 pages on the familiar house sparrow but only two and a half on the Swahili sparrow. General chapters follow rather than precede the species accounts. All species in the genus are very closely related; they are of similar size, food tastes, bill structure and plumage patterns and the chapters on inter-relationships, origins, evolution and systematic position need to be and are extremely thorough. Appendices deal with scientific names and synonyms (about 200), a very detailed reference list (about 700 titles) and an index. The book contains eight very attractive colour plates by Robert Gillmor, who has contributed the very many sketches of sparrows, their homes and habitats throughout the book. In addition there are 114 text figures, maps, charts, etc. and 50 tables. A very thorough and attractive book as we expect from this publisher. Recommended.

Hardback, 342 pages (162 x 242mm) price £22. Published by T. & A.D.Poyser Ltd., Town Head House, Calton, Waterhouses, Staffordshire, U.K. ISBN 0-85661-048-8.

THE QUAILS, PARTRIDGES & FRANCOLINS OF THE WORLD by Paul A.Johnsgard, 1988

It sometimes seems that the pheasants and other large, gaudy game birds are graced with a monograph every other year. Their duller and usually smaller cousins, the quails, partridges amd francolins, have not prompted a monograph this century - until now. This is the first monograph to illustrate and map all the 134 species of small game birds recognised by the author. These include 31 members of the *Odontophorinae* (New World quails) and the 103 members of the *Perdicini*, that is the Old World quails, partridges and francolins. Following a relatively short introductory chapter on the generalities of small game birds, comparisons with the larger species and details of the rules of nomenclature followed, there is a large chapter (40 pages) on comparative biology. This covers taxonomy, phylogeny, zoogeography, reproductive biology, ecology, population dynamics, growth and development, and finally, vocalisation and non-vocal behaviour. The other four-fifths of the book is devoted to the species accounts. The reader expects in a monograph, a full description of each species but one finds only rather short notes under identification in the field and in the hand. A note in the author's introduction suggests that it was originally intended to include detailed plumage descriptions but these seem to have been sacrificed at a late stage of publication to save space and cost. Other subjects covered for each species are measurements, general biology and ecology, social behaviour, reproductive biology, evolutionary relationships and status and conservation outlook. Under most headings for most species there is just one paragraph. For some of the rarer species "no specific information" appears quite regularly indicating how poorly known some of these birds still are. Vernacular names are given in English, German, French and Spanish and there is a short paragraph of the species distribution including, where appropriate, sub-species and a distribution map. There are 42 maps, some showing distribution of all species within a genus. For taxa above species there are general introductory comments and keys. The species accounts are not particularly inspiring, although authoritative. Undoubtedly the great attraction of this book are the wonderful plates by Major Henry Jones painted at the turn of the century and, until now, languishing in the Zoological Society of London library. Each plate is a masterpiece of colour and detail, usually showing the male and female of each species in, supposed, natural habitat. There are 127 plates. Twelve prepared by other artists are of species mainly discovered this century.

The text is also embellished by 23 good quality line drawings by the author. Of the 103 species of groups found in the Old World, eight species of three genera occur in Arabia. These are the mainly migrant (but also breeding) European quail, African harlequin quail, the endemic Arabian red-legged and Philby's partridges, chukar partridge, sand partridge and black and grey francolins. Arabian atlasophiles will immediately turn to the distribution sections of these species accounts but will unfortunately be disappointed. The book shows Arabian distributions which are now hopelessly out of date but this is perhaps understandable considering, for example, that the range of the Arabian red-legged partridge has been pushed about 700 k northwards since the inception of the atlas project. The book is complete with a bibliography (over 400 references) and an index. This monograph is recommended on the strength of the beautiful plates it contains.

Hardback, 264 pages (220 x 280 mm), price £47.50. Published by Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP. ISBN 0-19-857193-3.

DISTRIBUTION ATLAS OF SUDAN'S BIRDS WITH NOTES ON HABITAT AND STATUS by G.Nikolaus, 1987

In the last 35 years ornithologists and birdwatchers in the Sudan have been in a similar position to those in Arabia - they have had only scarce and expensive published reference sources available and almost nothing fully up to date. Gerhard Nikolaus has, after many years field work (1976-1984), changed all that and prepared this thoroughly competent, comprehensive, yet relatively inexpensive atlas of bird distribution in the country. His atlas is published in English as *Bonner Zoologische Monographien* No.25 and thus comes from a stable with a very high reputation for biological works. In style, it might be compared to a BOU check list with maps and pictures. Sudan is not quite as big as Arabia but many parts of it are just as remote and ornithologically unexplored. Compared with Arabia, however, it is much more diverse in its range of habitats and its African continental position gives it a huge range of bird species. Short introductory chapters deal with topography, climate and habitats. There is a comprehensive explanation of the sources of data and, in the latter case, the close similarity with the aims of ABBA are striking. The Sudan atlas, like ABBA, aimed to review all published literature sources, track down all musuem specimens and add them to all recent unpublished field observations. The author's industry in this task is very commendable. Because of the remoteness of parts of the country and not inconsiderable political disruptions in recent years, coverage has not been complete. Nevertheless about 4/5th of all atlas squares have some records. Most of the gaps are in the deserts in the north west which, like the Rub al Khali of Arabia have only a restricted range of habitats and are poorly populated by a generally predictable list of birds. The Sudan atlas uses a degree square format (there are four ABBA half degree squares in each degree square) but covers not only the breeding birds but also the winter visitors and migrants. The maps have simple symbols denoting breeding or non-breeding observations, migration directions and sub-species where appropriate. The text, shown alongside the maps, is in abbreviated style providing further details of status, distribution, months of occurrence, breeding periods, general abundance in the species preferred habitat and miscellaneous remarks. Those species that have been recorded only three times or less are not given a map. Altogether, a staggering 938 birds are dealt with in this way with details of additional species that have not been confirmed in the country.

Arabian atlas enthusiasts will be encouraged to see so many tantalising breeding occurrences on the Red Sea coast of Sudan just opposite the Red Sea coast of Arabia. Surely some could straggle across? There are almost 800 maps and the text is also scattered with a few dozen line drawings. The atlas is complete with a gazetteer, a list of the major collections and their whereabouts, a literature list and indexes. This book is a must for all those going to the Sudan.

Card covers, 322 pages (240 x 165 mm), price 64DM. Available from Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum Alexander Koenig, Adenaueralle 150-164, D-5300 Bonn 1, West Germany. ISBN 3-925382-25-9.

A BIRD ATLAS OF KENYA by Adrian Lewis & Derek Pomeroy, 1989

With 1,065 species, Kenya has one of the richest avifaunas in Africa. It is a largely dry country covering an area of 582,600 sq.k, in which some 838 species breed. Regular wintering birds and all but the uncommonest breeding species are mapped - 871 maps altogether. Extensive introductory chapters of this atlas deal with how the atlas project was set up and data collected, there is also a long, very interesting, section on the conventions used in assimilating the data and how the maps and information presented should be interpreted. The introductory chapters deal at length with the Kenyan avifauna generally and its relationships with the rest of the Afro-tropical region. The major part of this book is, not unexpectedly, given over to species accounts - usually two or three species are dealt with on each page with one or two maps per page. Information was collected by half degree squares as for ABBA and is presented on the maps by the use of six symbols indicating 'presence', 'probable breeding' and 'confirmed breeding' in two time frames - up to December 1969 and after January 1970. By a combination of the six primary symbols one can see clearly where species have bred previously but not recently. There are four translucent overlays in the back pocket of the book which give a key to the atlas squares, mean annual rainfall, mean altitude and the presence of highland/lowland forest. Some will find these overlays are not transparent enough to see the maps underneath clearly. The species accounts deal with the distribution in the Afro-tropical region generally, status, habitat, altitude and characteristics of its distribution in Kenya. Sub-species, morphs, super-species and species groups are discussed where appropriate. There is also information on seasonal distribution, vagrancy, abundance detectability and advice on the coverage and level of recording in respect of each species. There is no breeding information given which is disappointing as such data would have made the book much more useful to those ABBA contributors in south west Arabia who want information about the nidification of African birds. At the back of the book there is a very extensive bibliography of over 1,000 titles, a glossary of technical terms used and an index. The atlas is illustrated by a token eighteen black and white plates depicting Kenyan bird specialities - these plates have unfortunately not been reproduced to a very high quality. The book achieves its aim of scientific accuracy while being comprehensible to all. It will be as essential for the bird watcher in Kenya who wishes to find birds and interpret his records as it will be to the ornithologist interested in Africa. As a standard refernce work on East Africa this book will be an inspiration to many ABBA contributors.

Hardback, 620 pages (170 x 248 mm) price £35.50. Published by A.A.Balkema, P.O.Box 1675, 3000 BR Rotterdam, Holland. ISBN 90 6191716 6

DISCOVERING KUWAIT'S WILDLIFE by David Clayton & Keith Wells, 1987

Those who have birded through the juniper forests of south west Arabia, splashed through mangroves in Oman or wondered at the fantastic sandstone architecture of Midian probably regard Kuwait as, biologically and topographically, the boring corner of Arabia. The authors set out to demonstrate that this tiny state on the edge of the great northern Arabian plain, mostly lying below 100m and largely built up in coastal areas has much to offer the biologist. It is a sound scientific introduction to the ecology of Kuwait aimed at the average student of natural history. It has an integrated ecological approach which deals with biotopes as a whole, illustrating all life forms found in each habitat rather than a systematic approach trudging through classes and orders of animals and plants. The authors aim to demonstrate the interdependence and interconnections between various animals and plants and habitats and, in so doing, demonstrate the wealth of life in the desert, mudflat and towns of north east Arabia. In an effort to avoid scientific terminology the use of scientific names has been avoided in this book, vernacular names have been used or invented throughout. Not a very successful idea. Although scientific names have been given in the index they would have been much more use in the text where readers can decide for themselves whether to note them or pass over them. The wide ranging introductory chapter covers among other subjects, plate tectonics, present day topography and the zoogeographical influences on the wildlife in this part of the world. Thereafter the book is divided into some eleven chapters which might, broadly, be sub-divided into differing biotopes, particular groups of animals

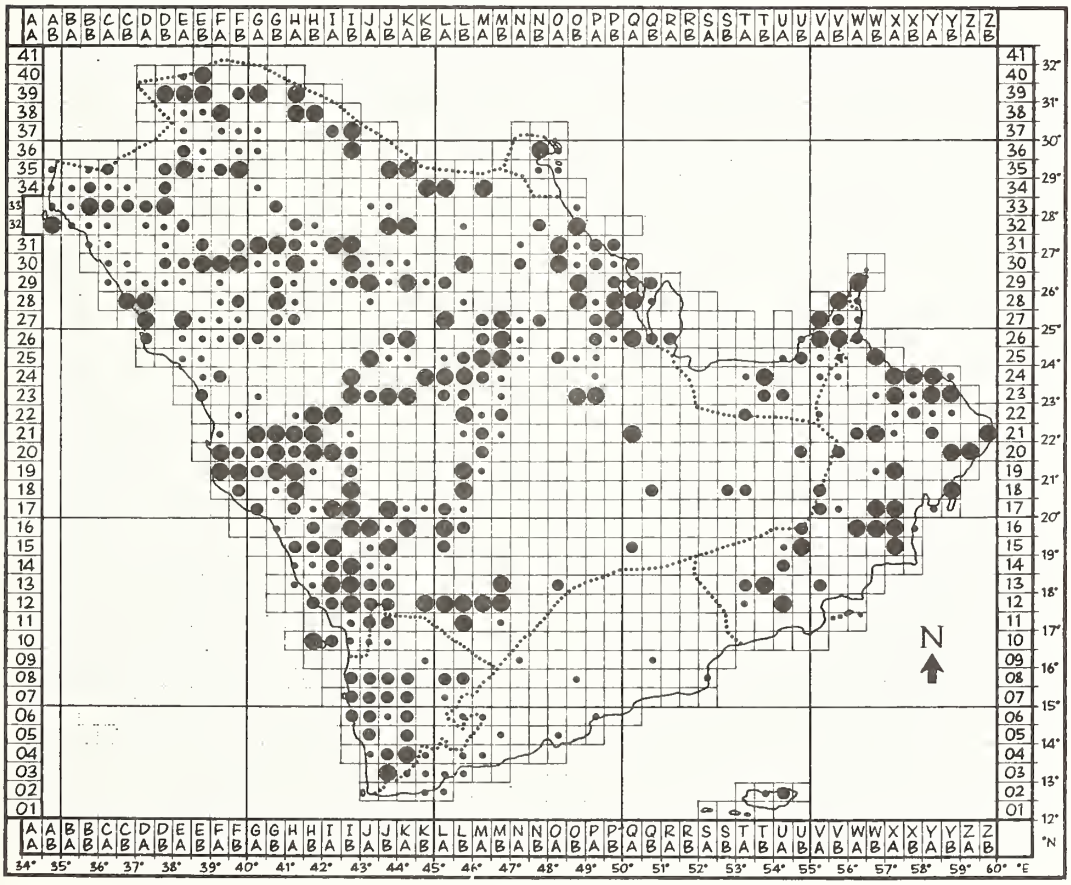
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Fig 7 The brown-necked raven is probably the most widespread breeding bird in Arabia.

- ● Confirmed breeding
- ● Probable breeding
- • Other records

and miscellaneous. Under 'biotopes' one finds chapters on desert, urban and inter-tidal animals and plants. Within each chapter all the types of animals found in that biotope are broadly considered, both invertebrate and vertebrate life as well as man's role. In the inter-tidal chapter birds are particularly well represented, as might be expected. Under the chapters which broadly relate to particular groups of animals we find sections on endangered species, migrants, dangerous animals, predators and the predated. Amongst endangered species there is the usual lament of Arabian wildlife books for the extinction of three species of gazelle, numerous predators, houbara and ostrich from this part of Arabia. Imaginatively, the locust is included in this category because it was previously numerous and devastating in the Kuwait area but is now a rare animal. The migrants (or travellers as the chapter titles them) are epitomized by birds but we find here interesting paragraphs on migrating dragonflies, ladybirds, even spiders. Spiders? - yes, they drift in the wind. The definition of travellers is extended to include animals which move their range only over a period of time, such as the ring-necked parakeet and the brown rat which have got to this part of Arabia in recent historical times. No general Arabian wildlife book is complete without a chapter on those gruesome, unpleasant life forms one finds under rocks, in one's shoes and slithering around unseen at night. The chapter on dangerous animals, with its menagerie of scorpions, camel spiders, black widow spiders, cobras, and some pretty unpleasant fish is a good summary of the subject. Predators and the predated section looks at animals that are at one time either prey or predator to another. There are four miscellaneous chapters which deal with conservation, the secret lives of animals (e.g. life cycles, symbiosis, adaptations), animal homes and their tracks. Conservation aspects hinge inevitably on man-induced problems in a fragile desert environment, the old story of over-hunting, over-exploitation and under-concern. This book is well endowed with very good quality photographs and a high standard of printing. There is at least one photograph per page, about 350 altogether, plus several line drawings and tables. The bird photographs are by Bill Stuart. The book is rounded up with a glossary of technical terms, an index of scientific names and subjects and bibliography. Recommended.

Glossy card covers, 259 pages (214 x 289mm). Published by Fahad al-Marzouk, c/o Zoology Department, Kuwait University, P.O.Box 5969, 13060 Safat, Kuwait. For copyright reasons this title is not available outside Kuwait. It costs 15 KD from the publishers or is available from the first author at the address shown for £25 (includes p & p).

THE SCIENTIFIC RESULTS OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'S OMAN WAHIBA SANDS PROJECT, 1985-1987 edited by Dr R.W.Dutton, 1988

Like so many geographical phenomena around the world the Wahiba Sands of eastern Oman is about the size of Wales. To be more explicit, this is an area of drifting sand dunes (in places mega-dunes up to 100 m high and 2 k apart), of approximately 195 k from north to south and 85 k from east to west. The area of primary dunes is approximately 9400 k^2 with a peripheral dunes area of 3500 k^2. These "Results" are a research monograph of the multi-disciplinary study papers originally submitted to a 1987 symposium on this unique area. Rarely has one area of desert been studied so deeply and the results published so attractively as in this volume, which appears as Special Report No.3 of the *Journal of Oman Studies*. This publication is the fruit of a joint project between the Oman Government and the Royal Geographical Society which carried out studies in the Wahiba Sands area between early 1985 and late 1987 with a large team in the field. The objectives of the study was to look at the early development of the sands, its ecosystem and the impact of recent changes that have occurred. The report, which includes a total of 52 separate papers, dwells especially on the inter-relationships between geography, biology and economy. The papers are divided into three main areas: earth sciences (17 papers), biological resources (23 papers) and economy and society (11 papers). The earth sciences chapter deals with terrain and geology, paleo-environments, the sands and moisture in all its forms. The biological resources section is an inventory of the flora and fauna of the area with an overview of the ecology of the region and the special position of *Prosopis* woodlands which are a unique feature of the area. Individual papers on the fauna include 11 papers on invertebrates and 4 on vertebrates. There is a long paper on the birds of the area, which includes 19 which are resident in the sands of a total of 150 reported in the area, mostly migrants on the coast. Of the nesting species, 6 are the most southerly and one is the most northerly of records in Arabia and one was found breeding for the first time in Oman during the study. For a more detailed account of the birds see the 'Sites of Interest' column above. The third section on economy and society deals with such wide ranging issues as bedu communities in the sands, their livestock, fishing of the coastal communities, traditional crafts, government incentive schemes and a system for evaluation and management of the sands. The book is printed on high quality art paper and is embellished with a large number of maps, drawings and tables plus well over 100 black and white photographs and 128 colour photographs. This report will be of interest to all those concerned with arid environments, the geology and geography of Arabia and sand deserts worldwide as well as bedouin economy and tradition.

Hardback, 596 pages (216 x 297 mm), price £40 (includes post & packing). Available from The Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, London SW7 (or Omani Rials 25 from The Department of Conservation, PO Box 246, Muscat, Oman). ISSN 0379-0703.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE SEA SHORES OF KUWAIT AND THE ARABIAN GULF by David A.Jones, 1986

This little book is a wide ranging guide to the plants and animals that inhabit the inter-tidal zone of the Arabian Gulf. The primary field study for this reference was based on Kuwait. However, the author has had much experience of tropical marine biology and has made the guide truly representative of life forms throughout the Gulf region and into the Indian Ocean. It is intended as a guide to be carried into the field to stimulate interest by those who are frustrated by the diverse life forms found on the average beach of the Gulf but it will also be of use to those already knowledgeable of the subject. Introductory chapters deal with hints on collecting and conservation of shore life, the precautions the student needs to be aware of in this biotope, topography of the Gulf, shore types and the zonation of shore life in the area. Water temperature, salinity and tides are dealt with under oceanography. The book is an introduction to both plant and animal life in an area where there are literally thousands of species, especially invertebrates. As such it can only hope to be a very superficial guide to the main and common forms. Only 16 pages and 11 plates are devoted to plant life, mostly some rather unexciting seaweeds. Ten common species, which most of us would recognise as plants, to be found in the salt marshes and inter-tidal zones are described and illustrated. The 'animals' section takes up the bulk of the book, although many groups, e.g.sponges, inhabiting Arabian beaches are hardly recognisable as animals. Representatives of most of the 25 invertebrate phyla are present in the Gulf. For each there is a general introduction and a description of the phylum, class and family with numerous identification keys. All the species accounts are backed up by a picture in the plates section. Sponges, worms, anemones and their kin take up most of the book, although the huge groups of molluscs and crustaceans are also well covered. Representative species of each taxon are described as to size, colour and shape, with notes of their habitat and distribution worldwide. The vertebrates are only represented by some 35 or so common fishes. The book is illustrated by Ann Alexander who has produced in all 54 beautiful plates, more than half of which are in colour.

Her paintings are accurately executed and her line drawings are to an especially high technical standard. In addition to the 54 plates (each illustrates up to about ten species) there are another 21 detailed anatomical drawings of animals and plants, maps and graphs in the text. This well rounded little book is finished up with a thorough bibliography, glossary and index. It is both attractive and an excellent guide to all the animal and plant forms occurring in and beside the Gulf and as such it is very much recommended to those interested in the subject. The review copy was kindly donated by Prof. Charles Pilcher.

Laminated card covers, 192 pages (160 x 210mm) price £6. Published by the University of Kuwait and distributed by Blandford Press, Link House, West Street, Poole, Dorset, BH15 1LL

Fig 8 There were several probable breeding records of Verreaux's eagle in Saudi Arabia during 1989.

WILD FLOWERS OF BAHRAIN: A FIELD GUIDE TO HERBS, SHRUBS AND TREES by Diana Charles Phillips, 1988

The state of Bahrain comprises 13 islands in all with a total area of about 690^2 k, 85% of which is on the main island. With a population of almost half a million, high temperatures, low rainfall and salty soil one might well imagine that the island is not too blessed with open spaces and wild plants. There are however almost 300 species that have been recorded on the island and this book is about 133 of them; photos and descriptions are given for each. There is a long, detailed introductory chapter dealing with, in turn, the geography, geology, climate, environmental factors relative to the island as well as notes on plant conservation and details of habitats. The species accounts are grouped by family arranged in English alphabetical order. For each plant covered there are scientific, English and Arabic names, details of its size, description, flowering periods and habitat, as well as locations in which they can be found on the island. Some interesting notes are added concerning the uses of each plant, especially medicinal uses. The book is illustrated by approximately 150 close-up colour photographs of plants and a few of habitats, with a small number of line drawings of plants and island scenes. Unfortunately, several of the colour photographs lack depth of field or are rather poorly printed, presenting a washed-out image. There are numerous useful appendices to the book, the most noteworthy of which are an index of Arabic names of plants (in Arabic), ideas for producing a local rockery and herb garden, a check list of all species found on the island and a glossary. This book has been very well researched and is recommended to those who want to know more about the local plants in Bahrain and elsewhere in the coastal region of the Gulf.

Hardback, 207 pages (168 x 238mm) price £25. Privately published, available from the Bahrain Natural History Society, P.O.Box 20336, Bahrain and Wheldon & Wesley, Lytton Lodge, Codicote, Hitchin, Herts. U.K.

WEEDS OF SAUDI ARABIA AND THE ARABIAN PENINSULA by Shaukat Ali Chaudhary and Muhammad Akram, 1987

Of the available books covering the plants of Arabia the majority concentrate on the flowering plants and those that most catch our attention. This book deals with the plants which are not attractive, eyecatching or useful, yet are tremendously significant to much of the agricultural economy in Arabia. It deals with all the most important weed species occurring in Arabia and as such fills a very important gap in the botanical literature of the region. It is a book that can be used by all who are interested in plants, not just the professional botanist but farmers worried about crop yields, agronomists concerned with weed control and gardeners. With the tremendous increase in agricultural production in Arabia in the last decade of two there has come a major problem with weed control. Not only in respect of indigenous species, which have persisted in the face of agricultural activities, but many introduced species which have arrived in a variety of un-natural ways. A thorough introduction gives a very interesting record of the problem of weeds, definitions of what weeds are and identifies what work has been done so far. The introduction is also in Arabic. The main part of the book provides species accounts of some 230 or so individual weeds, although another 120 are also mentioned. A typical species account is comprised of the scientific name with author, synonyms, Arabic and English common names, and the family to which the weed belongs. Each account is illustrated by a line drawing which shows, in most cases, the plant, its fruit, seeds, flowers and details of foliage, etc. There is a botanical description and information on method of growth as well as notes on its distribution in the Arabian peninsula, comments on occurrence, status, and method of propagation. Arabic notes are also given for each species. At the back of the book there is a list of useful references and a glossary of botanical terms. This very useful book fills a great need and is recommended to all those interested in Arabian plants.

Laminated card covers, 285 pages (164 x 235mm) price not known. Published by The National Herbarium, Regional Agriculture & Water Research Centre, Ministry of Agriculture & Water, PO Box 17285, Riyadh 11484, Saudi Arabia. USLCC No.87-60940.

PLANTS OF DHOFAR THE SOUTHERN REGION OF OMAN: TRADITIONAL, ECONOMIC AND MEDICINAL USES by Antony G.Miller & Miranda Morris, 1988

This book is much, much more than a book about plants. Its authoritative botanical text is illustrated beautifully by coloured paintings and is supplemented by a fascinating window into the culture of the Dhofari people. It is a study of the ethnobotany of this fascinating part of south Arabia where an ancient, traditional way of life is fast disappearing, being subsumed by cosmopolitanism. It is a work commissioned by the forward-looking Omani Conservation Department anxious to see that traditional, especially medicinal, uses of plants are recorded for posterity before their uses pass out of folklore. The foreward by His Majesty the Sultan of Oman and the preface by Professor Schultes of Harvard stress the importance of all plants to mankind and the essential need to conserve both the plants themselves and knowledge of their uses for future generations. Changing, modernising lifestyles has meant the fast loss of knowledge of local plants which is a loss to us all. Some of the medicinal secrets they hold could possibly even include another wonder drug that primitive herbal medicines elsewhere in the world have been the forerunners of. For a book which is effectively about two separate subjects, plants and their cultural uses, it is permissable to have two introductions. The botanical introduction by Antony Miller covers geology, topography and climate, history of plant collecting in Dhofar, vegetation zones, phytogeography and man and the environment. We learn that Dhofari plants have many affinities with those of Sokotra Island in the Gulf of Aden and Somalia, as well as being the only place in Arabia where several plants from

India and Africa are found together. The other introduction by Miranda Morris who contributes the ethnobotanical notes, deals with the selection of approximately 160 plants which are given detailed coverage. This is from approximately 750 plant species which occur in Dhofar, 50 being endemic. She also deals with plant names, agriculture, leather work and medicine generally in her introduction. The plant accounts naturally comprise the major part of the book and include the scientific name (with author, reference and date), and the Jibbali and Dhofari Arabic names. There is then a technical description of the plant, notes on the genus, numbers of species and their distribution followed by a general description of the plant, its manner of growth and the community of plants with which it is found. The nomenclature notes are an interesting touch.

The second author prepares the latter part of the species accounts and her contribution features the plant's uses in the Dhofari community. Uses are interpreted extremely widely and include not only food (for animals and humans), medicines and other obviously practical uses such as how well it burns but also how the plant parts are used in the making of artefacts like rope baskets and bird traps, in building and the preparation of products such as dyes and make-up. She often digresses into secondary or tertiary subjects relating to Dhofari culture, only loosely connected to plants. For example, in writing about the beautiful *Delonix elata* tree we learn that the wood is not liked as firewood or for producing charcoal but is in much demand for making lime in lime kilns. There then follows a short note on the uses of lime and quicklime in Dhofar and the surrounding areas. For the shrub *Dyerophytum indicum* we find that the stems are suitable for building bird traps and a short essay on bird trapping techniques follows. These short essays on the species dealt with, give this work an irresistable attraction. If ever there was a plant book with the "couldn't put it down" tag this is it. There are 148 full-page colour paintings by the renowned botanical artist Susanna Stuart-Smith giving the book an extremely attractive appearance. The paintings usually show one plant each (in some cases two species) with many details, general aspect, flower, stalk, seed and bud and, where appropriate, illustrations of artifacts made from the plant giving a consistent human connection throughout. The artwork is opposite the text, which gives the ideal layout. Thankfully the old publishers' dodge of cutting text to fit the artwork is not applied. Where the text exceeds one page there are continuation pages in a separate section at the back of the book. Appendices include a checklist of the plants of Dhofar, Jibbali and Dhofari Arabic plant names, glossaries of botanical and specialist terms, selected bibliography and index. A subject index of the ethnobotanical subjects covered would have been extremely useful but is not included. There are maps of Oman and Dhofar on the end papers. This book has everything, an authoritative but highly readable text and beautiful illustrations. Very highly recommended to all those interested in Arabian plants, students of Arabic culture and the geography of Dhofar. This book is also available in an Arabic edition.

Hardback, 388 pages (220 x 288mm) price £35.00. Available from Holmes Macdougall Ltd., Leith Walk, Edinburgh, U.K. ISBN 0-7157-0808-2.

THE LIVING DESERT by Marycke Jongbloed, 1988

This is another title in the Arabian Heritage Series. It is a very personal account of the author's desert experiences which have been mainly in the United Arab Emirates. The author is primarily a botanist, an interest which she has developed since her arrival in the UAE a number of years ago, but she is also an accomplished photographer and artist as well as being a part-time journalist on environmental issues. The book is arranged broadly to take readers through the environmental calendar of the UAE with special reference to botanical events. The chapters are arranged to cover six, two-monthly periods, and within each chapter there are essays which deal with a wide range of separate subjects. These are often places to visit, from the Liwa to Bahrain, and the animals and things to see and do at these places. Specific subjects covered are, for example, parasitic plants, camping in the desert, cicadas, dhow trips, animal dangers in the desert, moths and many more diverse matters. Every page is illustrated with colour photographs, about 120 in the main body of the text and a number of line drawings. After the calendar section there is a "field guide" to the common wild plants of the UAE. This comprises a further 134 colour plates with many smaller inset pictures of flowers in bloom. This section is probably one of the best published collections of southern Gulf plant photographs arranged for identification purposes. The field guide gives details of the habitats and regions where each plant is likely to be found. *The Living Desert* will be a great source of inspiration to those recently arrived in the Gulf who have an interest in the environment generally as it is a directory of 101 things to do and places to visit. It whets the appetite on many aspects of natural history and provides an especially attractive introduction to the plants of the southern Gulf. A list of the common names of plants, a scientific names index and a glossary, complete the book.

Glossy card covers, 104 pages (118 x 273 mm) price Dh.60. Published by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 12331, Dubai, UAE with the support of Shell Markets (Middle East).

ROTES MEER by Heinz D.Ritter & Helmut Debelius, 1988

The Red Sea has been the inspiration for very many colourful picturebooks and one suspects that the market ought by now to be saturated. But apparently not. This book is as much about photography and the skill of the photographer as it is about the Red Sea. In the 200 or so images presented (each 206 x 156mm) we can see many examples of the kaleidoscope of natural colour and wildlife this exotic part of the world presents. Photo captions are kept to a bare minimum and merely identify the subject and the photographer. The text is in German but as the total of text is limited to a short foreword and a paragraph or two introducing each of the five sections of the book, non-German readers will not be missing much. One can sit back and just enjoy the pictures. The high standard of photography has been well complemented by a superb standard of printing on heavy matt black art paper, giving a luxurious feel to the work. The pictures, contributed by 23 photographers, appear to be chosen for their artistic merits, colour, originality and unusualness. The cliche of sunsets, red skies and still waters is not spared us but is done to very good effect. Particularly stunning pictures are the Zabid mosque (YAR) in a sandstorm, which creates a Turneresque watercolour impression, and an anemone fish *Amphiprion bicinatus* nestling amid the noxious tentacles of an anemone with the sun streaming through the waters from above. The divisions of the book are: Geography and Geology (general views of reefs, mountains and landscapes), Climate (clouds and water and wind-worn rocks), Fauna and Flora (terrestrial plant life and a few birds), the Underwater World and History, the last dealing with architecture, people, their life, arts and commerce. As might be expected, the Underwater World chapter takes up the bulk of the book. Fish subjects predominate - they come in silvery shoals, displaying their formidable dentition or, in remarkable pictures taken from a variety of unexpected angles, all in their natural habitats. One particular series of photographs gives closeups of eyes of various fish, sharks, octopus and turtle, which create a wonderful impression of the diversity of nature. Invertebrates are very well represented with the useful colourful array of crabs, urchins, jellyfish, nudibranchs and fanworms coming in all bizarre shapes, sizes, geometric patterns and colours. Corals, sometimes soft and sometimes hard, but always beautiful, are there too. This book is not a scientific reference by any standards but underwater enthusiasts might well find photographs of life forms in this book which they have not seen elsewhere. Its value is the simple enjoyment it gives from its wonderful images. Every coffee table should have one.

Hardback with slip case, 208 pages (240 x 270mm) price 98DM. Published by Sturtz Verlag, Wurzburg. Available from Naglschmid, Augustenstr.61a, D-7000 Stuttgart, W.Germany, ISBN 3-8003-0327-2.

NEW ARABIC BOOK

A FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS OF PREY IN THE MIDDLE EAST by B.Bruun and A.Serhal, 1988

This book is a first in pocketable field guides in Arabic. It includes 18 coloured plates depicting 51 species of raptors in more than 300 different illustrations by Arthur Singer and Sherif Baha el Din. The species accounts deal with identification features, distribution, feeding, breeding and habitats, etc. These are embellished with thumbnail distribution maps which show occurrence between approximately 9°-44° N and 20°-63° E, that is a good chunk of north east Africa, all Arabia, Turkey, Greece and Iran. The maps differentiate between breeding and winter ranges. Because of the rather liberal interpretation of "the Middle East" this guide includes a number of species rarely dealt with in standard guides to the area, for example, the Indian white-backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and the African fish eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*. Introductory chapters cover nomenclature, migration routes, anatomy and conservation as well as touching on such subjects as history and folklore. It is finished off with a bibliography in English and an index list of species showing Arabic, English and scientific names. A very useful and recommended edition to the growing list of natural history titles available in Arabic.

Laminated card covers, 95 pages (192 x 116 mm), price $10 (post free). Prepared as a co-operative venture between the Holy Land Conservation Fund and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon. Available from HLCF, c/o Bertel Bruun, 969 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10028, USA.

NEW PERIODICALS

Bird Census News

Introduced in 1988, *Bird Census News* provides progress reports and information about ornithological atlas schemes and census studies worldwide. It is produced twice a year on behalf of the International Birds Census Committee and the European Ornithological Atlas Committee and is available from Rob G.Bijlsma. c/o SOVON, P.O.Box 81, 6573 ZH Beek, Holland.

MAX KASPAREK VERLAG, HEIDELBERG

Max Kasparek, who has authored numerous papers concerning the birds and environment of Turkey and nearby areas, has formed a small publishing organisation which has now made available a number of interesting titles concerning the fauna of Turkey and the Near East. The periodical *Zoology in the Middle East* (see review of Vol.1 in *Phoenix* 5:16) is published by Max with Professor Kinzelbach as co-editor. Three issues of this journal have now appeared; a leaflet giving details of the latest is enclosed in this issue of *Phoenix*. Other titles now available from Max Kasparek Verlag include:

> *A bibliography of the fishes of the Tigris/Euphrates Basin* by B.Coad and Al Hassan (1988)
>
> Several hundred references to the freshwater ichthyofauna of the whole of the Near East, including much from Iran and Arabia. 53 pages (A5), price DM19.80, ISBN 3.925064.05.2
>
> *Zoological bibliography of Turkey; pisces, amphibia and reptilia* by I.Baran, B.Coad and M.Kuru (1986)
>
> Again, a liberal geographic interpretation means that many titles concern the fauna of nearby countries in the Middle East. 118 pages (A5), price DM24.50, ISBN 3.925064.01.X
>
> *Birds of Turkey: Koycegiz-Dalyan* by A.Kilic and M.Kasparek (1989)
>
> No.8 in a series of check lists of the birds occurring at major bird sites in Turkey. 32 pages (A5), price DM7.00, ISSN 0177.4034

All the above are available from Mak Kasparek Verlag, Bleichstr.1, D6900 Heidelberg, W.Germany

+ +

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Where, in Arabia, would you expect to find a white-spectacled bulbul, a black-crowned tchagra

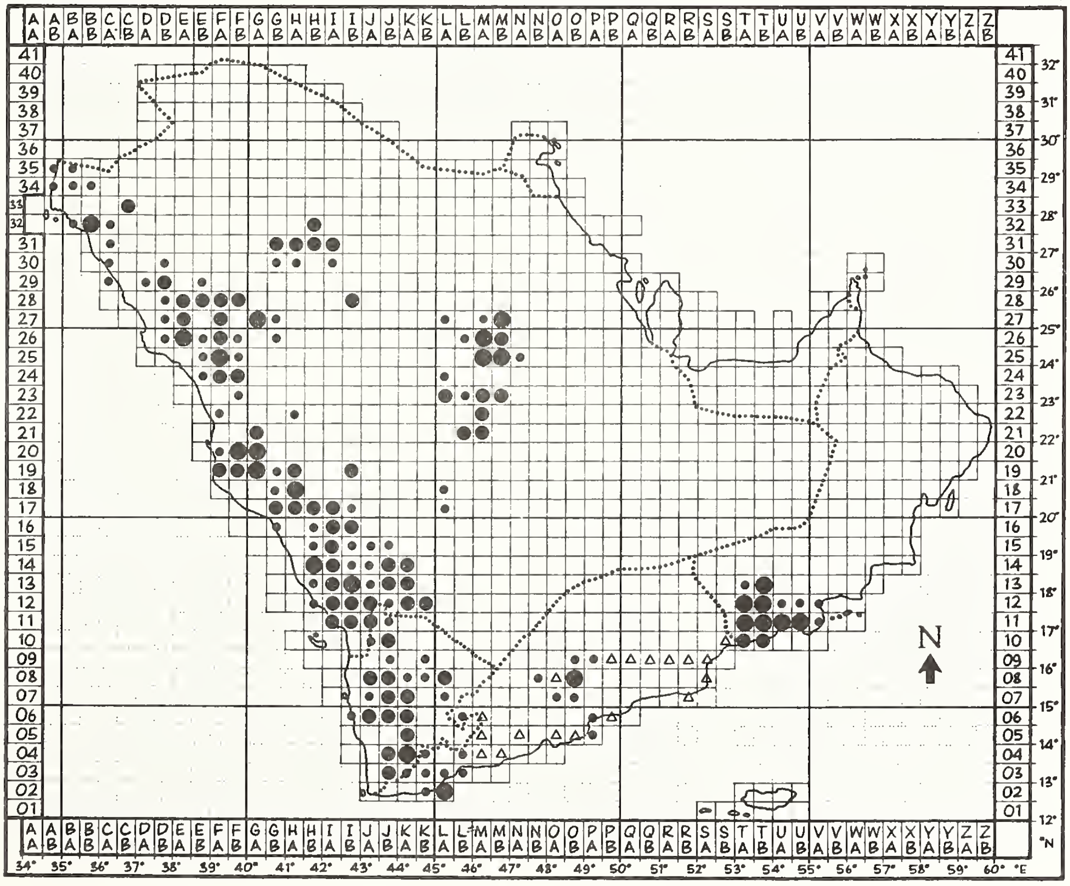
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Fig 9 The blackstart was one of the species shown to have a continuous range through south west Arabia during the 1989 ABBA survey in PDRY.

- ● Confirmed breeding
- ● Probable breeding
- • Possible breeding

△ PDRY records added Autumn 1989

and a chestnut-shouldered rock sparrow? These are not new escaped species or Afrotropical birds which have extended their range but merely new names suggested for some old friends – the yellow-vented bulbul, black-headed bush shrike and yellow-throated sparrow respectively.

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee in conjunction with *British Birds* have prepared a discussion document entitled *Suggested Changes to the English Names of some Western Palearctic Birds* in an attempt to standardise and rationalise, on an international basis, the common English names for birds. The need for such uniformity is judged to be particularly important now that many birdwatchers travel more extensively and are confused by and cause confusion with the vernacular names they meet with and use. Of the 800 or so birds of the Western Palearctic this paper reviews 200 odd names and suggests, with reasons, new names for them or, in a few cases, why the old ones should be kept. The objective is to give each species a unique name which can be used on a worldwide basis to simplify communication and remove the more inappropriate titles. The geographical area of coverage does not, of course, extend to the Arabian Peninsula as such august bodies as the BOURC, *British Birds*, *BWP* etc. have not yet accepted that Arabia is predominantly palearctic. However, some 42 species on the list occur as breeding species in Arabia and a further 74 occur in this region as migrants. Many of the suggested names are already alternative names which we know and use and so there is likely to be no problem assimilating them. Others are more novel and may take some time to be widely accepted. Yet others will never be accepted. Some examples of changes and the reasons given are as follows: white pelican becomes great white pelican (to distinguish it from the Nearctic white pelican); western reef heron becomes western reef egret (it is an egret not a heron!); black vulture reverts to the older name of cinereous vulture (to avoid confusion with the North American black vulture); lanner becomes lanner falcon (adding the family name makes it a more meaningful label); stone curlew becomes northern thick-knee ('Curlew' is misleading and incorrect and the Old English name of thick-knee, now used for many other birds in this family, is reverted to while 'northern' refers to its range). And so it goes on. The BOURC published their ideas for names standardisation in late 1988 and will be taking suggestions and comments all through 1989. Once they have a measure of agreement on names, or, what is more likely, a lack of objections, they propose to publish their results as recommendations in the hope that all authorities will follow the new names.

STARLINGS GALORE

Seven species of starling seen in one day might be possible in south east Asia or, maybe, in Africa but never in Arabia! Well.....it is now! In fact it happened on 10 March 1989 near Abu Dhabi sewage outlet. Winter visiting common starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and rose-coloured starlings *S.roseus* were joined by hoards of common mynah and a few bank mynahs. Added in were two jungle mynahs *Acridotheres fuscus*, a pied mynah *S.contra* and a hill mynah *Gracula religiosa*. Peter Hellyer tells the story of this unique event in *Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi) Bulletin* 38:24-25. The numbers of these species fluctuated each day during the spring of 1989 until the day they finally all turned up together.

Bank and jungle mynahs have occurred at various urban areas around Arabia as escapes and their numbers and consistency of occurrence suggest that breeding is taking place. However, the bank mynah has only been recorded breeding once in Dubai and the jungle mynah has never been recorded breeding in Arabia. Observers are urged to try and confirm the nesting of these birds and report details. As stressed in earlier issues of *Phoenix* breeding escapes are just as important (if not always as interesting) as breeding indigenous species. A breeding pair of exotic birds may be the seed of a large population in the future and many exotic species are potentially economic pests. Most observers and authors seem to pass over escapes as an unimportant nuisance but with most of the resident avifauna in some large towns now being dominated by escapes, we need to take a special view of these species and record their occurrence systematically.

BIRDS & LOCUSTS

1988 saw a natural phenomenon not witnessed in Arabia for some twenty years – locust swarms. Swarms, probably originating from sub-Saharan Africa invaded Arabia on a wide front, reached all regions to a greater or lesser extent and government contigency plans as far north as Jordan swung into operation. In south-west Saudi Arabia very many locust swarms invaded – some were 12 k deep.

It is well known that many birds opportunistically utilise the abundant food provided by a locust swarm, even species that are not normally insectivorous feast on them. Others follow locust swarms and end up well outside their usual range. Still other species are prompted by this super-abundant food source into early breeding, double brooding or extended clutch sizes, quite outside their usual habits.

Initial reports of birds and locusts in 1988 have included large flocks of lesser kestrel *Falco naumanni*, following locusts, great grey shrikes, babblers, little owls and barn owls commencing breeding in October on the arrival of locust swarms and some unexpected records of Arabian bustards in south-west Saudi Arabia. The latter observation may be connected with the locusts, as they do eat them, or it may be the bustards are responding to other stimuli such as the heavy rain and green vegetation which occurred in 1988 and which may also have attracted the locusts.

1988 and, to a lesser extent, 1989 presented exceptional opportunities to observe the rare spectacle of locust swarms and it is important that observers should report how the swarms may have affected birds. All reports concerning birds and locusts will be much appreciated. Details of unexpected species feeding on local locust swarms, extra-limital sightings of species following locusts, heavy concentration of birds and exceptional breeding observations will all be welcome. In addition, other relevant information such as instances where locusts have deprived birds of food or shelter or interfered with breeding in some way or otherwise threatened species is needed.

I am grateful to Peter Symens and George Popov for information contained in this article.

M.C.J.

THE 1989 ASIAN WATERFOWL COUNT IN OMAN

From 6 to 12 January 1989 eighteen dedicated bird people scoured almost the entire length of the Omani coastline from the UAE border in the north to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south, the objective being to count wintering waterfowl. Waterfowl, in this context, included all species normally frequenting the coastline or wetland areas. The results are quite staggering. 100 species were recorded with a grand total of 226,566 birds. The species range included 11 herons, 15 ducks, swans and geese, an almost unbelievable 41 species of wader and 17 gulls and terns. The gulls and terns were the most numerous group with over 113,000 birds, the wader total was 92,000. However, the count included one estimate that, in the legendary Barr Al Hikman mudflats, opposite Masirah Island, there could well have been several hundred thousand waders present! Observations there included 119 great knot! Clearly the Barr Al Hikman mudflats are an area of outstanding international importance for waterfowl. A full report of the account is to be found in *Oman Bird News* No.6 (1989).

FOR SALE:NCWCD TECHNICAL REPORTS OF ATLAS SURVEYS

To date, the co-ordinator of the ABBA project has made eight atlassing surveys. For each survey a simple summary report is prepared within a few weeks of completing the study (usually 4-8 pages of single spaced A4). The summary report is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. These reports run to 50-70 pages. In line with the stated ABBA ethic of making all information amassed by the project available to all those who want to use it, these full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies and a very small number are available for sale. Reports of Surveys Nos.4, 5 & 6 to the Asir National Park, northern Arabia and the Asir-Hedjaz Mountains respectively, are currently available. For details see the sales list accompanying this issue.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS: OSME AGM 1990

The 1990 (12th) Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East will take place on Saturday 7 July at the Lecture Theatre of the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. Times and details are not yet available but, on past experience, the AGM promises to be an interest-filled afternoon with probably at least one speaker on Arabia. In previous years, attendance at the AGM has entitled members to free entry to the museum (admission is currently £2.50) as well as receiving a 10% discount on all books and sales items that are bought in the museum shops.

SOCIETY NEWS

Yemen Arab Republic

The Ornithological Society of North Yemen, after a short spell as the Nature and Ornithological Society of Yemen, has reverted to its old title and sphere of influence. The revamped OSNY is issuing newsletters from time to time but its membership has effectively been decimated by members leaving the country. Birdwatchers resident in YAR are urged to join the Society and help keep it going. The contact for the group is Claire Yarborough, c/o British Council, Sanaa, YAR.

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

There is no organised group yet for ornithologists or naturalists in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Wildlife and environmental issues are coordinated by the Research and Extension Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Aden. Nabeel Obadi of the Wildlife Section is studying birds in South Yemen and is very keen to make contact with individuals and societies interested in the natural history of the region. Nabeel has recently published a book in Arabic on the birds of South Yemen, which he would be pleased to send to anyone who would like to have it, at the cost of £18, inclusive of postage. It will be reviewed in *Phoenix* 7. Nabeel is also interested in mammals and other wildlife in the PDRY and has recent records of leopard, caracal, ratel, ibex, gazelle and wolf. It is recommended that anyone visiting PDRY should contact Nabeel, whose address is P.O.Box 916, Crater, Aden, PDRY.

Kuwait

It is now "official" that the Ahmadi Natural History and Field Studies Group, Arabia's oldest organised natural history group, has finally succumbed to a lack of support, facilities and finance. There is no news yet as to whether another group is likely to rise to fill this vacuum. The ABBA library has a complete set of ANHFSG newsletters thanks to donations from Bill Stuart, Bish Brown, Stan Howe and David Clayton.

The Oman Bird Group

Although ornithology has been organised in Oman for some years with an official Oman Bird Record Committee and *Oman Bird News* up to issue 6, the grouping of like-minded individuals has, until now, been anonymous. *Oman Bird News* 6 (August 1989) floats the suggested name of The Oman Bird Group. This is likely now to be taken on. The Oman Bird Group has loose affiliations with the Historical Association of Oman which has interests in natural history. Its present projects include an Oman bird sites register, winter wader studies, ABBA matters and, of course, *Oman Bird News*. The recorder is Jens Eriksen. Anyone going to Oman is urged to contact the group c/o the Natural History Museum, PO Box 668, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Ornithological Society of Egypt

OSE was formed in 1982 and, apart from an early first issue of the society's journal *The Courser* it has remained dormant in terms of publications ever since. The Society has now published *Courser* 2 and promises another next year. Papers in the new issue include raptor migration in Egypt, the birds of the Western Desert and Arabian warblers in Egypt. Membership is open to all at a cost of LE5 (members resident in Egypt) or US$10 for those resident outside Egypt. Address: OSE, c/o Flat 8, 4 Ismail el Mazni Street, Heliopolis, Cairo 11351, Egypt.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The *Flora of Arabia project*

The Arabian Peninsula lies at the meeting point of several major phytogeographical regions and has a rich and intrinsically interesting flora. There are from 3,500 to 4,000 species, a considerable number of which are endemic. Despite the rapid economic development of the region with its consequent effects on the natural environment, there is still no readily available means of identifying plants from most areas.

The *Flora of Arabia* will be a major reference source for specialists such as botanists, agriculturalists and agronomists, an important aid to biological teaching in schools and universities, and also a useful guide for those purely interested in discovering the richness of the plant life of the region.

The *Flora* will cover the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen (including Socotra) and the Yemen Arab Republic. All native flowering plants and ferns will be included as well as cultivated and amenity plants of economic importance. It will be published in five volumes of approximately 430 pages each and will take about ten years to complete; the first volume should be published in two years' time. Keys will be provided to families, genera and species; line illustrations will complement the keys and descriptions, and there will be maps showing the distribution of every species. The *Flora* is edited at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, with the collaboration of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew; there are also contributions from specialists in the Arabian Peninsula and other countries.

Further information can be obtained from A.G.Miller, Royal Botanic Garden, Inverleith Row, Edinburgh, EH3 5LR, U.K.

RECORDS WANTED

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, and who have not yet received the "Instructions to Contributors" and a set of report forms, are urged to make contact with the co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is sought but possible and probable breeding information is just as valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO *PHOENIX*

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Consideration should be given to offerring more lengthy papers to the journals or newsletter of local or regional natural history groups and societies. Scientific papers on the ornithology of Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East may be offerred to *Sandgrouse* the journal of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, England. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports etc. are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. All submissions should be typed, double spaced, with wide margins.

HOW TO OBTAIN *PHOENIX*

The *Phoenix* is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to benefactors and recent correspondents. A bundle of every issue is also passed to each society or group active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £15 ($30) for the next five issues, i.e. numbers 7 to 11 inclusive. Subscribers receive a reminder when their next subscription is due. *Phoenix* nos 1-5 are available at £2 each. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Any profit on sales and subscription orders goes towards ABBA administrative costs.

ABBA VACANCIES

In late 1989 the NCWCD granted initial funds to enable ABBA to purchase computer hardware and computerise all records collected to date. This grant will lead to a fully funded sponsorship agreement in due course. As a result it is expected that from Spring 1990 there will be funds available to pay for two part time staff:-

Researcher This person will be required to work on literature, museum and other sources of ABBA records. The work will involve the preparation and authorship of bibliographies, checklists and other papers as well as monitoring on-going ABBA sub-projects and initiating new ones. The person sought would need to be thorough, resourceful and understand computers. An interest in Arabian birds or ornithological atlases would be an advantage.

Secretary/Data processor This post will be responsible for secretarial and administrative aspects of the project. It is envisaged that during the data capture phase (6 months) the post could, if preferred, be full time. Eventually the work is expected to settle down to about 20 hours per week. Depending on the post holder's experience, this post could be expanded to include research for the project.

Hours for both positions will be flexible according to the post holder's needs and it is expected that much work can be done at home. The ABBA office will be located in the Huntingdon area of Cambridgeshire from Spring 1990. Those interested should send for details.

ADVERTISEMENT

North Yemen Trip : Autumn 1990

Rod Martins is planning a 'no frills' birding trip to North Yemen during September 1990. Anyone interested in joining the trip should contact him at 6 Connaught Road, Norwich, NR2 3BP, mentioning this advertisement. Rod has led several successful trips to Yemen; his most recent in Autumn 1989 logged over 230 species.

DONATIONS & SPONSORSHIP

The cost of running the project continues to escalate, with total costs during 1989 expected to rise to £2,500. The project could not function without the generous financial help which has been given by many individuals and organisations and this essential assistance is very gratefully acknowledged.

The NCWCD, Riyadh, made a very handsome donation to the project of £1,200 during the year, including £700 for the preparation, printing and mailing of *Phoenix* 5. As in previous years, OSME has been very generous with a donation of £200 for ABBA administrative costs and a further £200 towards the expenses of the co-ordinator for a survey in PDRY.

Donations have also been very gratefully received from M.al Safadi (YAR) £11; P.J.Cowan (Kuwait) £10; P.Heathcote (UK) £10; P.Hellyer (UAE) £5; D.R.James (KSA) £25; S.Marchant (Australia) £20; Mrs K.Mounib (Abu Dhabi) £5; Qatar Natural History Society & Brian Eccleston £50; A.J.Stagg (KSA) £25; D.H.Thomas (UK) £10; A & I Thompson (KSA) £10; S.T.A.Turner (UAE) £5 and F.J.Walker (UK) £10.

Just as important as financial help is the practical help and assistance which has been received from many quarters. Mrs Effie Warr gave much help again in the preparation of this issue of *Phoenix* and on other projects throughout the year. The NCWCD gave essential assistance to the co-ordinator for a survey of north-west Saudi Arabia in spring 1989 and provided the air fare to Aden for the autumn 1989 survey of PDRY. The logistic help of the Research and Extension Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Aden with the PDRY survey, especially the provision of a vehicle, is also very much appreciated.

PHOTOS NEEDED FOR *PHOENIX*

Photos of habitats, Arabian breeding birds, nests and eggs etc. are welcomed and requested for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos should be black and white (glossy or matt) with good contrast and a width of at least 12 cm.

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Fig 10 The house sparrow is not present in all urban areas in Arabia - is it a recent colonist? (From *The Sparrows* by J.D.Summers-Smith)

CREDITS

Phoenix logo, Keith Brockie; Figs 1, 2, 5 & 8 and title page layout, Hilary Welch; Fig 10, Robert Gillmor; maps, M.C.Jennings.

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ADDRESS

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